Queens, Consorts, Concubines

GREGORY OF TOURS AND WOMEN OF THE MEROVINGIAN ELITE



E. T. DAILEY

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Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite

By

E. T. Dailey

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Cover illustration: Fredegund crushes her daughter Rigunth, as a servant cries for help (*Historiae*, IX. 34). Engraving from Henriette de Witt (née Guizot), *Vieilles histoires de la patrie* (Paris: Hachette, 1887).

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

To my father,
who sent me on my adventures

Contents

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As the product of research that began during my doctoral studies at the University of Leeds, I must thank my PhD supervisor, Ian Wood. Indeed, Ian first recommended this topic to me, and his continuous input has helped shape the content of the volume and, I must admit, spared me many blushes along the way. I have also benefited from the assistance generously offered by many other scholars, including most especially Helmut Reimitz, Jo Story, and Emilia Jamroziak, who have been steadfast supporters of my research and career. I am also indebted to the many organisers and participants involved in the annual conference on *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, the related sessions presented at the annual *International Medieval Congress* held in Leeds, the conferences on *Historiographies of Identity* hosted by the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften and the VISCOM project team, and the conference on narrative construction and cultural memory, *Erfahren – Erzählen – Erinnern*, held at the Otto-Friedrich Universität, Bamberg, in 2011. To these individuals and institutions should be added the School of History at the University of Leeds, which served as the host institution for both my doctoral and MA research (and which offered a generous bursary in support of the former), as well as the University's Institute for Medieval Studies and the many young researchers therein who offered their advice and insight. Though there are too many individuals deserving thanks to mention by name, I must single out Nicky Tsougarakis, Meritxell Pérez Martínez, Stephen Werronen, Sheryl McDonald, Michael Garcia, and Hope Williard, who read drafts of my work and gave invaluable feedback. And I must thank Sylvie Joye, who kindly provided me with many useful materials in French that might otherwise have passed me by.

Lastly a special mention is reserved for Richard Gerberding, who first exposed me to the joy of studying the Roman Empire and its aftermath in the West, including the Merovingians and their most illustrious historian. Indeed, the research presented here is, in a sense, the final product of one of my early undergraduate assignments—a reading and analysis of the scandalous revolt

of nuns in Poitiers as recounted by Gregory of Tours in Books IX and X of his *Histories*. It is my hope that my work, and my enthusiasm for the history of Late Antiquity, can benefit not only the academic community but also a new generation of students, as Professor Gerberding's passion for the subject and for teaching did for me and my peers: *nemo nisi per amicitiam cognoscitur*.

E. T. Dailey
Leeds, West Yorkshire, 2014

Abbreviations

The Works of Gregory of Tours

De cursu stellarum ratio	Gregory of Tours, *De cursu stellarum ratio*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 854–72 (pp. 404–22); trans. by Edward Peters and William C. McDermott, *Monks, Bishops, and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500–700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975; orig. publ. 1945), pp. 207–18
Gloria confessorum	Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 744–820 (pp. 284–370); trans. by Raymond Van Dam, *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Confessors* Translated Texts for Historians, 5 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988; repr. 2004)
Gloria martyrum	Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 484–561 (pp. 34–111); trans. by Raymond Van Dam, *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs*, Translated Texts for Historians, 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988; repr. 2004)
Miracula beati Andreae	Gregory of Tours (?), *Liber de miraculis beati Andreae apostoli*, ed. by Max Bonnet, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 821–46 (pp. 371–95)
Passio et virtutes sancti Iuliani	Gregory of Tours, *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 562–83 (pp. 112–33); trans. by Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 162–95

Historiae	Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum* X, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1951); trans. by O. M. Dalton, *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927); trans. by Lewis Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974; repr. 1986)
In psalterii tractatum commentarius	Gregory of Tours, *In psalterii tractatum commentarius*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 873–87 (pp. 423–27)
Septem dormientes apud Ephesum	Gregory of Tours, *Passio sanctorum septem dormientium apud Ephesum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 847–53 (pp. 396–403); trans. by Edward Peters and William C. McDermott, *Monks, Bishops, and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500–700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975; orig. publ. 1945), pp. 197–206
Virtutes sancti Martini	Gregory of Tours, *Libri I–IV. de virtutibus sancti Martini*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 584–660 (pp. 134–210); trans. by Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 199–303
Vita patrum	Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885; new edn 1969), pp. 661–743 (pp. 211–83); trans. by Edward James, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, 2nd edn, Translated Texts for Historians, 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991; repr. 2007)

Other Abbreviations

CCSL — Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 194 vols to date (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)

CSEL — Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 99 vols to date (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: 1864–)

Fredegar, *Chronicae* — *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 1–193; partial trans. by Jane Ellen Woodruff, 'The *Historia Epitomata* (third book) of the Chronicle of Fredegar: An Annotated Translations and Historical Analysis of Interpolated Material' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1987); partial trans. by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations* (London: Nelson, 1960)

MGH, AA — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores antiquissimi*, 15 vols (Brelin: Weidmann, 1877–1919)

MGH, DD Mer. — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Diplomata regum Francorum e stripe Merovingica*, 2 vols (Hannover: Hahn, 2001)

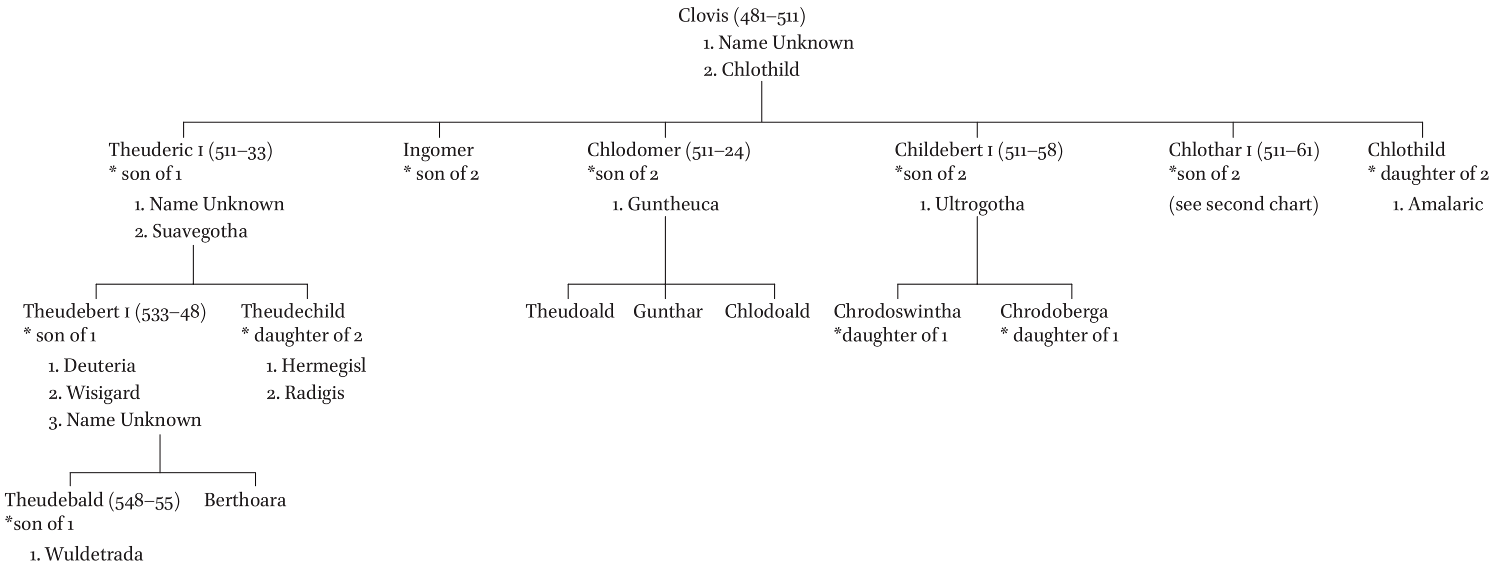
MGH, Epistolae — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, 8 vols (Brelin: Weidmann, 1891–1928)

MGH, Leges nationum Germanicarum — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Leges nationum Germanicarum*, 5 vols (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1892–1966)

MGH, SRM — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 7 vols (Hannover: Hahn, 1885–1951)

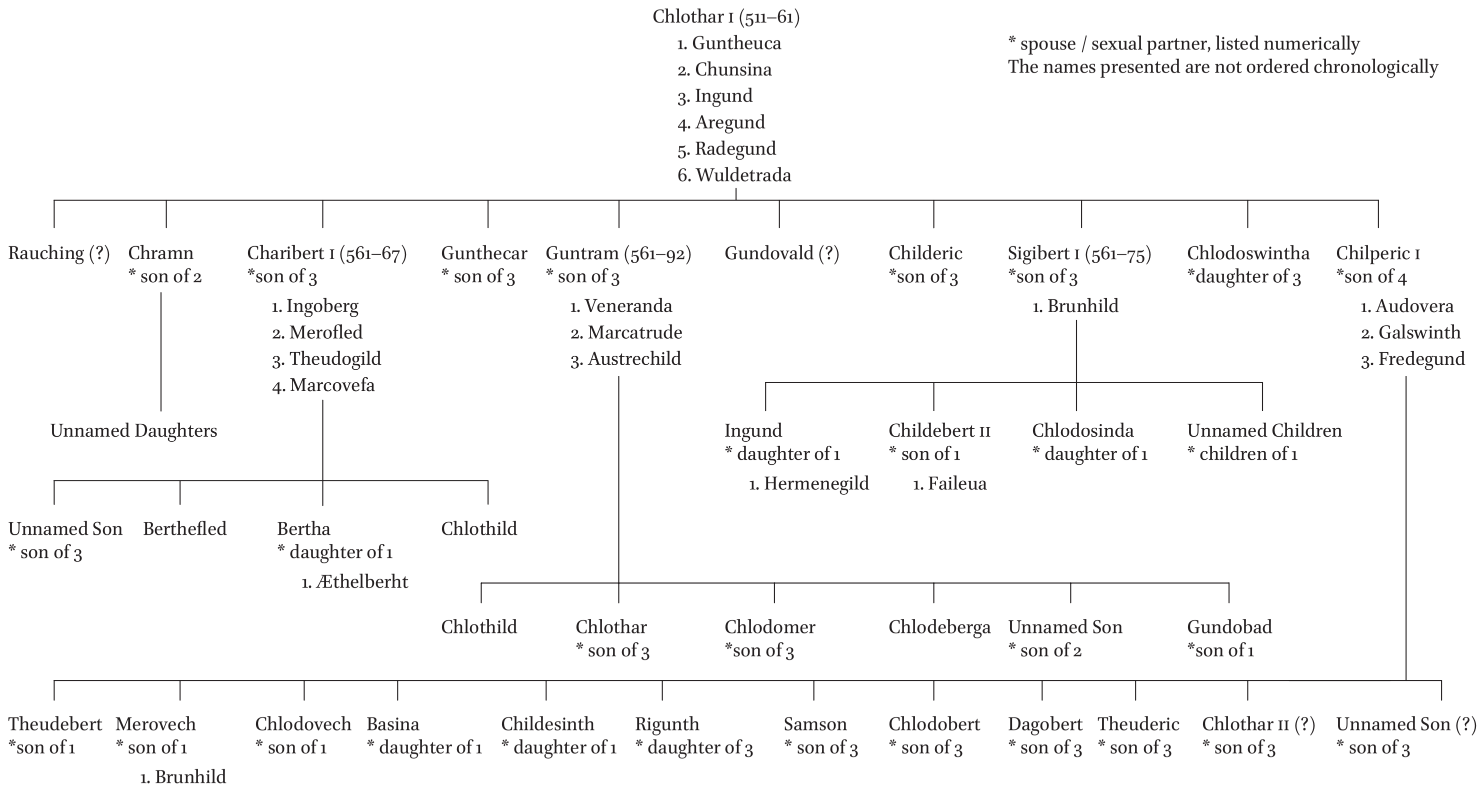
PL — *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 217 vols (Paris: Migne, 1844–55)

The Merovingian Royal House I: The Family of Clovis



* spouse / sexual partner, listed numerically
The names presented are not ordered chronologically

The Merovingian Royal House II: The Family of Chlothar I



Introduction

Gregory of Tours stands tall in the study of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. From his post in sixth-century Gaul, he witnessed key developments in the transformation of the West, and he produced a weighty corpus of writings that continues to attract the interest of scholars. Gregory also directed his own society through this transformation, both as an author who inspired his audience, and as a participant in the events he recorded. If Gregory had never taken up the pen, scholars would still know him as a bishop of an important see and a member of an old, prestigious family. Any attempt to use Gregory's writings as a historical source, therefore, must begin with an understanding of the bishop himself, both as an individual and as a representative of his society. Scholarship, particularly in the past quarter century, has shown this to be no easy task. Indeed, few other late antique authors have proved to be quite so difficult to evaluate. Gregory wrote engaging, even charming prose. He concealed his literary sophistication behind a simple style, keen to be seen as an honest, straightforward, and humble Christian. Thus, Gregory has beguiled more than a few scholars into accepting his version of events without sufficient reservation. Indeed, there remains a tendency, especially in studies of medieval women, to treat his prose as a mine containing priceless nuggets of information that merely require extraction—without requisite critical judgement. Certainly there are gems to be found: Gregory was connected to many prominent women in his society and he wrote about them at length. However, before his writings can be used as a historical source, it is necessary to identify his views on issues relating to women and the literary techniques he used to express them. Nor is this merely a point about the study of women in the sixth century: Gregory allowed such opinions and personal connections to influence his entire corpus, and therefore no study of the bishop, his society, or indeed the transformation of the West in general can proceed without sufficiently considering the women in his works.

Scholars have offered several interpretations of Gregory as an author, which, if put together, form a complex, perhaps even confused, picture. Giselle de Nie drew on Gregory's use of metaphor and the intense, emotive, even poetic character of his miracle stories to demonstrate his thoroughly spiritualised interpretation of experience, in which divine agency abounded.[1] Walter Goffart also examined Gregory's presentation of the miraculous as a common feature

1 Giselle de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987).

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004294660_002

of a world that depended on God for its enduring existence. But Goffart concentrated more on the political within Gregory's works and, in particular, his use of satire to express the ultimate futility of worldly endeavours.[2] Gregory's relationship with both the powers of this world and of the world to come were put into a more precise context by Ian Wood. Thus, when it came to recounting the actions of kings, Gregory wrote as a political insider with his own set of personal allegiances that inspired words of praise or criticism accordingly.[3] Similarly, when it came to the veneration of saints, Gregory was particularly interested in highlighting those saints who had an association with his own family and the familial estates.[4] Wood also stressed Gregory's individuality and his cleverness as an author, two issues that complicate any attempt to use his writings as a historical source or to use his opinions as a representation of common views within society.[5] This should not, of course, lead one to question the authenticity of Gregory's beliefs or his adherence to moral principle, two qualities that were made especially apparent in the scholarship of Raymond Van Dam. Gregory regarded himself as a 'companion' (*alumnus*) of the saints and he put this into practice.[6] Lastly, Martin Heinzelmann emphasised that Gregory's role as a bishop simultaneously made him a pastor and a politician, which in turn impacted his writings—not only their content, but also their form and structure.[7]

2 Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (*AD 550–800*)*: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

3 Ian Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 71 (1993), 253–70.

4 Ian Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Mayke de Jong and Francis Theuws (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 137–54; Ian Wood, 'The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. by Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 34–57.

5 Ian Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 29–46; Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 63 (1985), 249–72. See also Ian Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, Gwynedd: Headstart History, 1994).

6 Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The topic of the *alumnus* is mentioned on pp. 52–68 and 91–93. See also Kathleen Mitchell, 'Saints and Public Christianity in the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours', in *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), pp. 77–94; and John Corbett, 'The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Medieval History*, 7 (1981), 1–13.

7 Heinzelmann, Martin, *Gregor von Tours* (*538–594*)*, „Zehn Bücher Geschichte": Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft,

There are clearly important differences between these interpretations, but they share much in common, and for us this is more important. Two points of agreement in particular deserve emphasis. Firstly, Gregory reworked his material in a sophisticated way so that it aligned better with his opinions and objectives. This contrasts the view prevalent in older scholarship that regarded Gregory as a simple and naïve recorder of events.[8] Secondly, Gregory deployed various narrative strategies to effectively communicate his points to his audience.[9] We will encounter these strategies and examine them in detail throughout this study, but let us note one in particular upfront. Gregory occasionally introduced himself as a character in his own works, sometimes as a witness to key events, sometimes as a participant in those events, and sometimes as a mouthpiece for orthodoxy. Though it is tempting to regard these passages as clear windows into Gregory's thoughts and deeds, Guy Halsall has shown that they are often the most obscure.[10] A more profitable approach assesses Gregory's relationship with his contemporaries and analyses his presentation of them within the context of his literary themes. Thus we sometimes learn more about Gregory from his silences than from what he actually said.

Gregory knew many of the women who appeared in his works personally. Some even came from his own family, such as his mother, Armentaria, his niece, Justina, and his sister (whose name we do not know). On the whole, Gregory said rather little about his own family, but on several occasions he mentioned his mother, and she clearly had a great deal of influence on him, as we shall see in Chapter 1.[11] Gregory also had dealings with royal and aristocratic

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1994), trans. by Christopher Carroll, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

8 For a historiography of scholarship on Gregory concentrating on the issue of naïveté, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 1–5; Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 114–19; de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*, pp. 1–26; and Adriaan H. B. Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), pp. 13–21.

9 This topic was first addressed in the pioneering study of Felix Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours: Topoi und Wirklichkeit* (Bern: Lang, 1974). In particular, Thürlemann demonstrated the manner in which Gregory used reported speech to express ideas that were his own.

10 Guy Halsall, 'Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writing of History', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 337–50.

11 See Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 7–21; and Ralph W. Mathisen, 'The Family of Georgius Florentius Gregorius and the Bishop of Tours', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 48 (1984), 83–95.

women, in particular the queens Brunhild and Fredegund, discussed at length in Chapters 6 and 7. As we shall see, Brunhild promoted Gregory's career and she exercised considerable political influence throughout his lifetime, so he had every reason to treat her carefully within his works. In contrast, Gregory castigated Fredegund at every opportunity, detailing her murderous, treacherous, even sacrilegious scheming. On one occasion, Gregory was dragged before a tribunal in 580, charged with slandering her as an adulteress. Though he was probably guilty, he escaped conviction. Dramatic events such as this risk overshadowing less noticeable, yet equally important moments that offer insights into Gregory's sympathies. For example, in 589 he journeyed to meet the dying Ingoberg, a former queen of Charibert I, to help her draft her last will and testament. His efforts were rewarded, as she included a benefaction for ecclesiastical institutions in Tours. Gregory also worked closely with a former queen of Chlothar I, the Radegund of saintly medieval fame, who founded the convent of the Holy Cross in nearby Poitiers and excelled in her piety and asceticism. When she died, Gregory presided over her funeral, holding back his tears. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Gregory had a close relationship with Radegund's nuns, though this caused him some trouble. Lastly, one must recall Gregory's more mundane dealings with the women in his congregation and beyond, which he undertook as a pastor and as an important civic official. These duties surely took up a considerable amount of his time, even if they largely went without comment in his works.

The city of Tours itself took pride in a history that included important women. Queen Chlothild, for example, had spent most of her time there during her long widowhood, which lasted from 511 to 544. She thus had many years to develop a reputation for piety and to shape the legacy of her family. This family included her husband, Clovis, the great patriarch of the Merovingian dynasty, her sons, Chlodomer, Childebert I, and Chlothar I, who each ruled parts of Gaul during her lifetime, and her daughter and namesake, who married the Visigothic king Amalaric. Tours also enjoyed visits from other queens, like Ultrogotha and the aforementioned Radegund, as well as various notable women. A convent, for example, had been founded there by Ingitrude, who was related to the royal family, while another had been founded by an aristocratic woman named Monegund.[12] Like the many other visitors to the city,

12 These examples are discussed in Chapter 2, except for Radegund's visit, which appears in Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 14, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 364–77 (p. 369).

these women were attracted by the shrine of St Martin, which was crucially important for Tours and its bishop.[13]

Gregory took charge of the see in 573, appointed by King Sigibert and his wife Brunhild, together with Radegund.[14] After this, if not before, he was thoroughly entangled in the politics of his day—'up to his neck', in the words of Guy Halsall.[15] Yet this probably came naturally to Gregory: he had been born into a distinguished family, which owned estates and enjoyed influence throughout the Auvergne and beyond, and he had spent much of his youth in the ecclesiastical circles of Clermont and Lyon, where his relatives served as bishops.[16] Indeed, his face had probably become familiar to those in Sigibert and Brunhild's court long before he acquired his episcopal post.[17] Tours was not one of the largest cities, but it was one of the most important. Sitting astride the Loire, Tours served as a major crossing point for access into Aquitaine, a territory divided equally, in theory, among the various Merovingian kings, who

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13 See especially Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', pp. 35–36; Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power'; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 11–28 and 69–81; and Luce Pietri, *La ville de Tours du IVe au VIe siècle: naissance d'une cité chrétienne* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1983), pp. 36–87. On Gregory and the cult of the saints generally, see Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 155–65; John Corbett, '*Praesentium signorum munera*: The Cult of the Saints in the World of Gregory of Tours', *Florilegium*, 5 (1983), 44–61; and Peter Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', repr. in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 222–50.

14 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, V. 3, in Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, ed. by Frederic Leo, *MGH, AA*, vol. IV. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), pp. 7–292 (pp. 106–07). The poetic works of Venantius Fortunatus have also been edited by Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes*, 3 vols (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1998–2004).

15 Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', p. 346.

16 On this and what follows, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 26–31; and Margarete Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit nach den Werken Gregors von Tours*, 2 vols (Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 1982), vol. I, pp. 205–07. On Gregory's education, see Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 6–10; and Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth through Eighth Centuries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 193–206.

17 Martin Heinzelmann, 'Bischof und Herrschaft vom spätantiken Gallien bis zu den karloingischen Hausmeiern: Die institutionellen Grundlagen', in *Herrschaft und Kirche: Beiträge zur Entstehung und Wirkungsweise episkopaler und monastischer Organisationsformen*, ed. by Friedrich Prinz (Stuttgart: Hiersmann, 1988), pp. 23–82 (pp. 72–73).

therefore had an interest in the city and its bishop.[18] Tours changed hands several times. It experienced the devastation of war and, in Gregory's telling, it also came face-to-face with the devastation of the tax collector.[19]

As Tours was a metropolitan see, Gregory oversaw several other bishops, whose neighbouring dioceses inconveniently fell under the jurisdiction of different kingdoms within Merovingian Gaul.[20] The Merovingian royal family ruled a complex political entity, which, for most of Gregory's lifetime, was divided into three kingdoms—Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy—based on multiple centres of power and dependent cities rather than clear territorial boundaries, though it is still possible to speak of heartlands and peripheries.[21] Occasionally attempts were made by ambitious claimants to carve out an extra share of territory and thus further divide the Merovingian realm. At other times, a strong king succeed in uniting the kingdoms under his rule. As we shall touch upon in Chapter 5, inheritance and succession were more

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18 Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', p. 33. On Aquitaine, see Eugen Ewig, 'L'Aquitaine et les pays rhénans au Moyen Âge', repr. in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, ed. by Hartmut Atsma, 2 vols (Munich: Artemis, 1976–79), vol. 1, pp. 553–72; and Michel Rouche, *L'Aquitaine, des Wisigoths aux Arabes, 418–781: naissance d'une région* (Paris: Editions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Éditions Touzot, 1979).

19 For Gregory's attitude toward taxation, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 102–15.

20 Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, pp. 293–302. In theory a hierarchy existed within the metropolitan sees, although its precise nature was debated, see Louis Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Paris: Thorin, 1894–1915), vol. 1, pp. 84–144. On the Merovingian episcopate in general, see Bernhard Jussen, 'Über „Bischofherrschaften" und Prozeduren politisch-sozialer Umordnung in Gallien zwischen „Antike" und „Mittelalter" ', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 260 (1995), 673–718; Edward James, '*Beati pacifici*: Bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. by J. Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 25–46; Martin Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien: Zur Kontinuität römischer Führungsschichten vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Artemis, 1976); and Friedrich Prinz, 'Die bischöfliche Stadtherrschaft im Frankenreich vom 5. bis 7. Jahrhundert', in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 217 (1974), 1–35.

21 On the Merovingian realm, see Martina Hartmann, *Die Merowinger* (Munich: Beck, 2012); Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450–751* (New York: Longman, 1994); Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Eugen Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988); and Eugen Ewig, *Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511–613)* (Wiesbaden, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, 1953).

flexible and *ad hoc* than appears at first glance, but in theory political legitimacy remained a matter of paternity: to rule, one needed to be the son of a former king (though this was no guarantee).[22] Numerous magnates and officials also exercised authority within each kingdom, including most importantly the *dux*, who governed large allotments of territory and also served a military role, and the *comes*, who acted as an agent of the king in a given city and whose secular power coexisted, sometimes uncomfortably, with the power of the local bishop.[23] Although these titles later gave rise to the signifiers of 'duke' and 'count', in this study they have been rendered in their original Latin form, as with other offices such as that of the *ex-domesticus, cobicularius*, and *maior domus*, to avoid anachronism.

The Merovingians ruled over territory that had once formed part of the Roman Empire. Gregory proudly described his family as 'senatorial' in status, thereby identifying himself with the local, ancestral population rather than the 'barbarians' who had established themselves in Gaul during the twilight of imperial rule in the West—though by the sixth century the 'senatorial' title depended as much on wealth and political connections as on ancient pedigree.[24] Indeed, it is very difficult to describe the composition of Gallic society through such social signifiers. The use of ethnic terminology, for example, is fraught with risk, much like the word 'barbarian' itself—which is meant here only to signify those peoples who had originated from beyond the borders

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22 E. T. Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours, Fredegund, and the Paternity of Chlothar II: Strategies of Legitimation in the Merovingian Kingdoms', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 7.1 (2014), pp. 3–27; Marc Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions: A "Genealogical Charter"?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17 (2009), 1–22; and Ian Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. by Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 149–71.

23 On the office of *dux* and *comes*, see Archibald Lewis, 'The Dukes of the Regnum Francorum, AD 550–751', *Speculum*, 51 (1976), 381–410; Karin Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie der merowingischen Amtsträger in der Zeit von 511 bis 613* (Bonn: Selle-Hosbach, 1974), pp. 20–32; Dietrich Claude, 'Untersuchungen zum frühfränkischen Comitat', *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte – Germanische Abteilung*, 81 (1964), 1–79; and Rolf Sprandel, '*Dux* und *comes* in der Merowingerzeit', *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte – Germanische Abteilung*, 74 (1957), 41–84.

24 On the significance and meaning of this title in sixth-century Gaul, see Brian Brennan, 'Senators and Social Mobility in Sixth Century Gaul', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 145–61; Frank Gilliard, 'The Senators of Sixth-Century Gaul', *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 675–97; and Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1948).

of the Empire, but which conjures up unhelpful images of the primitive brute.[25] The Merovingians rose to prominence as a leading family among the 'Franks', a group that began as a loose collection of warriors assembled from various 'barbarian' peoples living around the lower Rhine. Though for later periods it is possible to describe the rulers, kingdoms, and people of Gaul as 'Frankish' without much fuss, such usage is anachronistic in a sixth-century context. Gregory used the term 'Frank' sparingly, primarily to describe high ranking men whose backgrounds were theoretically different from his own.[26] I have therefore avoided using the term and its conventional counterpart, 'Gallo-Roman', in this study.

I have also used the terms 'aristocrat' and 'noble' rather loosely, to describe high status individuals who were not clearly identified as members of the Merovingian family. Though we will focus largely on the upper echelons of this group (home to Gregory's own social circles), the nobility stretched downward in great diversity to encompass lesser magnates and local notables of limited

25 See the essays collected in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, eds, *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, eds, *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Ildar Garipzanov, Patrick Geary, and Przemysław Urbańczyk, eds, *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Walter Pohl, ed., *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004); Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl, eds, *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Andrew Gillett, ed., *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); and Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, eds, *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

26 See Helmut Reimitz, 'The Providential Past: Visions of Frankish Identity in the Early Medieval History of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae* (Sixth–Ninth Century)', in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1000*, ed. by Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 109–35; Helmut Reimitz, 'The Art of Truth: Historiography and Identity in the Frankish World', in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Corradini and others (Vienna: Österreiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 87–104; Edward James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks', in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 51–66; and Ian Wood, 'Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in the Early Medieval Historiography', in *Concepts of National Identity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Simon Forde (Leeds: Leeds School of English, 1995), pp. 21–46.

wealth and reach.[27] Indeed, the sheer breadth and variety of this group thwarts efforts to define its constitution with precise terminology or to explain its origins with a single narrative.[28] Not that scholarship has been shy to try, but this academic project found itself sailing into an ever-thickening fog of complexity, and it was last seen beached on the shores of unresolvable questions over 'Roman' versus 'Germanic' customs and 'public' versus 'personal' bonds of loyalty.[29] Thus we will only chart the waters of the second half of the sixth-century and we will take irreducible diversity for granted, even if we contradict the attitudes of the elites themselves, who guarded their titles and family origins with reverence. While the elites may have thought of themselves as an exclusive group distinguished by noble birth, thereby rationalising family wealth and influence, in truth the aristocracy remained open and fluid. Prospects for advancement, such as the acquisition of offices, arrangement of advantageous marriages, and service to superiors promised access to higher and higher tiers of society. Conversely, decline threatened even the wealthiest families. Inheritance required careful management, property required vigilant defending, and competitors needed to be checked at every opportunity. Indeed, the very insecurity of 'nobility' itself is largely to blame for the bewildering complexity of family relations, titles, and lineages that complicate efforts to categorise and describe the aristocracy with scholarly precision.

A different sort of confusion can arise from the names the Merovingians and the nobles gave themselves. These were usually formed by combining two elements taken from the names of close relatives, resulting in a relatively small

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27 On the elite, see François Bougard, Hanz-Werner Goetz, and Régine Le Jan, eds, *Théorie et pratiques des élites au haut Moyen Âge. Conception, perception et réalisation sociale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); François Bougard, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan, eds, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Régine Le Jan, *La société du haut Moyen Age VIe–IXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2003); Régine Le Jan, *Femmes, pouvoir et société dans le haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 2001); Karl Ferdinand Werner, *Naissance de la noblesse: l'essor des élites politiques en Europe* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); and Margarete Weidemann, 'Adelsfamilien im Chlotharreich. Verwandschaftliche Beziehungen der fränkischen Aristokratie im 1. Drittel des 7. Jahrhunderts', *Francia*, 15 (1987), 829–51.

28 Paul Fouracre, 'The Origins of the Nobility in Francia', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. by A. J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 17–24.

29 See, for example, the debate as it appears in Franz Irsigler, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des frühfränkischen Adels* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1969); and František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Prague: Nakladatelství Ceskoslovenské Akademie, 1965).

pool of quite similar sounding or even identical names. Over the whole of the Merovingian period, for example, there were six members of the royal family named Theuderic and five named Dagobert. Likewise, during the specific period under consideration here we see one Gundobad who was a prince of the old ruling family of Burgundy, and another Gundobad who was the son of the Merovingian king Guntram, a later ruler of Burgundy. There was also a *dux* named Guntram, which even Gregory found confusing, referring to this latter figure (sometimes, but not always) as Guntram Boso. Equally baffling might be that Childebert I was the uncle of Charibert, who was in turn the uncle of Childebert II. Throughout this study I have sought to remain clear, avoiding the proliferation of such names when they may be safely omitted, but it is impossible to prevent every instance of potential confusion. Similarly, there is no academic consensus on the rendering of the names found in our sources into English. In general, I have retained Latin names in their original form ('Innocentius' rather than 'Innocent'), dropped Latinate endings from non-Latin names ('Gundulf' rather than 'Gundulfus'), and made exceptions where they seem prudent ('Clovis' rather than 'Chlodovech' for the famous king, 'Guntram' rather than 'Gunthchramn/us', 'Gregory' rather than 'Gregorius', and so on).[30]

Gregory himself navigated these pitfalls in nomenclature and terminology, in addition to the more obvious challenges presented by his social and political context, to produce a literary corpus that must be regarded as a monumental achievement.[31] His most substantial work is undoubtedly his *Ten Books of Histories*, referred to hereafter simply as the *Histories*, which he began to write shortly after he took up his post in Tours in 573. Gregory continued to work on this text over the next two decades of his life until his death in or around 594,[32] expanding, amending, and modifying his material in ways that are only occasionally traceable, as he did with most of his other works.[33] These other works

30 Thus I generally follow the prosopography found in Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 350–63.

31 For modern editions of Gregory's works, see the List of Abbreviations at the beginning of this study.

32 On the date of Gregory's death, see Gabriel Monod, *Études critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne*, 2 vols (Paris: Franck, 1872–85), vol. I, p. 38.

33 For the chronology of the composition of Gregory's works, see Jean Verdon, *Grégoire de Tours: le père de l'Histoire de France* (Le Coteau: Horvath, 1989), pp. 80, 84; Rudolf Buchner, *Gregor von Tours: Zehn Bücher Geschichten*, 2 vols (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), vol. I, pp. vii–li; and the 'Praefatio' to the 1951 *MGH* edition of Gregory's *Historiae*, pp. ix–xxxviii. A dissenting opinion was expressed by Alexander Callander Murray, 'Chronology and the Composition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours',

include: *The Suffering and the Virtues of St Julian, The Glory of the Confessors, The Glory of the Martyrs, The Life of the Fathers*, and *The Virtues of St Martin*. Gregory also wrote a treatise *On Reckoning the Course of the Stars*, a commentary on the Psalms, and a preface to the Masses of Sidonius (the latter two are now lost), and he has been attributed as the author of a work on *The Miracles of the Blessed Andrew*, and on *The Seven Sleepers in Ephesus*. To produce such a weighty corpus was clearly exceptional. Nevertheless, one must assume the presence of a flourishing literary culture in which such an output was likely to be appreciated, even if Gregory himself downplayed this as part of his complex rhetorical strategies.[34]

In this exceptional corpus of writings, the *Histories* merit special attention. In composing narrative history, Gregory entered lonely waters. Few in the West had struck such a course the previous century and a half (though one must mention Cassiodorus's lost history of the Goths).[35] Gregory was joined, at least, by chronicles produced in Gaul around this time, though these merely included short annalistic entries on key events.[36] This certainly complicates attempts to test the accuracy of Gregory's *Histories*, but there are many texts belonging to other genres available for the task, including several works of hagiography.[37]

Journal of Late Antiquity, 1 (2008), 157–96. Murray was concerned primarily with the *Histories*, arguing that Gregory wrote the work in one extended, singular effort late in his life. Although I do not concur with Murray, his hypothesis has no significant impact on the conclusions reached in this study.

34 See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 27–31; Ian Wood, 'Administration, Law and Culture in Merovingian Gaul', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 63–81; Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 480–751* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 21–42; and Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 112–19.

35 The absence of history during the period has been remarked upon by others; see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 118; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 165–66; François-Louis Ganshof, 'L'historiographie dans la monarchie franque pour les mérovingiens et les carolingiens', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo*, 17 (1970), 631–750 (pp. 632–42); and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours in the Light of Modern Research', repr. in *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 49–70 (p. 55).

36 The best example is perhaps Marius of Avenches, *Chronica a. cccclv–dlxxxi*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *MGH, AA*, vol. XI (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), pp. 225–240. See also Steven Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers: Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler of 452* (Leeds: Cairns, 1990).

37 On Merovingian hagiography, see Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Martin Heinzelmann and Monique Goullet, eds, *L'hagiographie mérovingienne à travers ses*

As we shall see in Chapter 3, for example, two hagiographic texts were produced on Radegund and these are key to evaluating Gregory's discussion of the queen and saint.[38] A substantial collection of letters from the sixth century also exists, which is especially useful for identifying Gregory's strategic silences.[39] To these one might add documentary sources of relevance: *diplomata* and *capitularia* produced by the royal administration, legal texts then in circulation, and the promulgations of church councils.[40] Finally, two later narrative histories written in Gaul also help contextualise Gregory's information by indicating alternative readings of the same events, even if they were many years removed and largely dependent upon the *Histories* for information:

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réécritures (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 2010); Martin Heinzelmann, 'Grégoire de Tours et l'hagiographie mérovingienne', in *Gregorio Magno e l'agiografia fra IV e VII secolo*, ed. by Antonella Degl'innocenti, Antonio de Prisco, and Amore Paoli (Florence: Sismel, 2007), pp. 155–92; Isabelle Réal, *Vie des saints, vie de famille: représentation et système de la parenté dans le Royaume mérovingien (481–751) d'après les sources hagiographiques* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640–720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Paul Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990), 3–38; Ian Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', in *Fälschung im Mittelalter V: Fingierte Briefe Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen* (Hannover: Hahn, 1988), pp. 369–84; Martin Heinzelmann, 'Une source de base de la littérature hagiographique latine: le recueil de miracles', in *Hagiographie, culture et sociétés IVe–XIIe siècle* (Paris: Université de Paris, 1981), pp. 235–59; and Friedrich Prinz, 'Heiligenkult und Adelsherrschaft im Spiegel merowingischer Hagiographie', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 204 (1967), 529–44. For a methodological discussion, see Anne-Marie Helvétius, 'Les saints et l'histoire: l'apport de l'hagiologie à la médiévistique d'aujourd'hui', in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. by Hanz-Werner Goetz (Bochum: Winkler, 2000), pp. 135–63; and Felice Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: "Hagiographical" Texts and Historical Narrative', *Viator*, 25 (1994), 95–115.

38 Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*; and Baudonivia, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 377–95.

39 *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH, Epistolae*, vol. III. 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 110–53; *Epistolae Wisigoticae*, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH, Epistolae*, vol. III. 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 658–90.

40 *Diplomata, chartæ, epistolæ, leges aliaque instrumenta ad res Gallo-Francicas spectantia*, ed. by Jean Marie Pardessus, 2 vols (Paris: Ex Typographeo regio, 1843–49); *Concilia Galliae*, ed. by Charles Munier, CCSL, 148–148A, 2 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963). On Merovingian church councils, see Gregory Halford, *Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Odette Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1986); and Carlo de Clercq, *La législation religieuse franque: étude sur les actes de conciles et les capitulaires, les statuts diocésains et les règles monastiques*, 2 vols (Louvain: Bureau du Recueil, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1936–58).

the *Chronicles* attributed to Fredegar (which were in fact the work of multiple, unidentified authors working in the latter half of the seventh century),[41] and the anonymous *History of the Franks* (*Liber historiae Francorum*), written c. 727.[42]

Gregory only mentioned his audience directly on a few occasions, but it is clear from these and from the thematic content of his works that he expected to reach a wide audience—one that included elites and those of lower status, secular and ecclesiastical, male and female. He wrote in a Latin drawn from the vernacular speech of sixth-century Gaul, though his prose took different forms and sometimes employed elevated language.[43] Gregory's field of vision centred on Gaul; when it extended further, it gazed toward the Mediterranean and then the East, rather than to the hinterlands of the north.[44] Since he mostly wrote hagiography, and since texts of this genre were often intended to be read out in liturgical contexts, Gregory probably had an audience in mind

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41 I have retained the attribution to the otherwise unknown 'Fredegar' as a matter of convenience. I have also retained the four-book division found in the edition of Bruno Krusch, even though the author(s) of the work never intended it to be divided as such: *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 1–193. See Roger Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (Hannover: Hahn, 2007), pp. 16–25 and 82–83.

42 *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 215–328. On the identity of the author, see Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 146–59; Janet Nelson, 'Gender and Genre in Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages', *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), pp. 149–63 (pp. 160–61); and Wood, 'Administration, Law and Culture in Merovingian Gaul', p. 78, n. 107.

43 On Gregory's Latin prose, see Guy Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*: Its Form, Context and Significance', *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 297–317; Neil Wright, 'Columbanus's Epistulae', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 29–92 (pp. 32–39); Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 311–19; Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 145–50; Jean-Baptiste Joungblut, "Recherches sur le « rythme oratoire » dans les *Historiarum libri*", in *Convegni del Centro Studi sulla Spiritualità Medievale*, 12 (Todi: Presso l'Accademia tudertina, 1977), pp. 327–64; Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours*, pp. 59–72; Helmut Beumann, 'Gregor von Tours und der *sermo rusticus*', in *Spiegel der Geschichte: Festschrift für Max Braubach zum 10. April 1964*, ed. by Konrad Repgen and Stephen Skalweit (Münster: Aschendorff, 1964), pp. 69–98 (pp. 81–89); and Max Bonnet, *Le latin de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: Hachette, 1890), pp. 77–79. On Latin as the vernacular language of Gaul, see Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 21–30.

44 Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 186–255.

that included clerics, monastics, and pious laypeople, especially pilgrims to St Martin's shrine.[45] Given the close relationship between secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies in Merovingian Gaul, this necessarily included the secular elite as well—the great families, royal and aristocratic, that provided the church with the bulk of its personnel, funding, and protection (and even the occasional pilgrim).[46] This obviously prevented Gregory from writing with complete candour, especially regarding sensitive political issues, but it also served as an opportunity to influence those who were in power indirectly through subtle arguments and well-considered examples.

Gregory located his many opinions and arguments, spread across his works, within a single setting that unifies his entire corpus. In this temporal world, with its vicissitudes and vanities, the devout struggle to live a moral life in the midst of violence, heresy, apathy, and ignorance. Yet it is also possible to discern the agency of God and his saints, breaking through the veil of the unseen to offer guidance and mercy, rigour and discipline, or justice and retribution, as required. This metaphysical primacy of the eternal imbues Gregory's works with a sense of permanence and security. Whenever turmoil or desperation appears, the reader knows that a reckoning is due, on the Last Day if not before, that will set everything right. It was no mere convention that Gregory chose to include a creed near the beginning of his *Histories*, or that in Book I he covered events from Creation. To read Gregory's works is to breath an atmosphere of divine authority and certainty. Yet one must not become light headed. Gregory lived during a time of tremendous social, political, and cultural change. A mere two hundred years before he became bishop in 573, Christianity had not yet become the official state religion of the Roman Empire. By Gregory's day, Christianity was the chosen religion of nearly every important, newly-formed kingdom in the West. Advance a mere one hundred years and most of what Gregory took as certain is up for grabs: armies from Arabia, celebrating the conquest of the East and North Africa, are poised to incorporate the Iberian peninsula and perhaps even Constantinople into the new Caliphate.

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45 Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours', p. 69. On the use of hagiographic texts in the liturgy, see Els Rose, *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West* (*c. 500–1215*) (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Marc Van Uytfanghe, 'L'audience de l'hagiographie au VIe siècle en Gaule', in *Scribere Sanctorum Gesta*, ed. by Étienne Renard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 157–77; Marc Van Uytfanghe, 'L'hagiographie et son public à l'époque mérovingienne', *Studia Patristica*, 16 (1985), 54–62.

46 See Ralph W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 89–104; Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 203–12; and Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500–1000* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 49–63.

Among the many transformations of the period, one must include the position of women in society. This topic has received its share of scholarly attention, especially in recent years, and scholars have naturally included Gregory's works in their studies.[47] Yet there have been remarkably few examinations of Gregory's overall presentation of women or his underlying opinions.[48] Over the following seven chapters, we will examine these issues, including Gregory's opinions on widowhood, sanctity, authority, agency, marriage, queenship, and court politics. These subjects mattered to Gregory and consequently they shaped much of what he wrote, sometimes unexpectedly. By gaining a better understanding of the women in Gregory's works, we will develop a better understanding of Gregory himself and his society, which was rushing headlong through a period of great change. Through this process, I also hope we will glimpse the engaging, charming writer I mentioned above. For all the talk of their scholarly importance, Gregory's works have remained popular for more than just their historical value. Indeed, I fear the preceding discussion has been unduly austere. A master storyteller, Gregory knew how to retain the interest of his audience and conjure emotions through delightful prose. If, as I claimed, he has 'beguiled more than a few scholars', then I must include myself among the enchanted, and that is surely no misfortune. After many years of study it remains a pleasure to read through Gregory's writings, and to allow his stories to entertain, as they always have, since he last set down his pen.

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47 See, for example, Claire Thiellet, *Femmes, reines et raintes* (*V*e*–XI*e *siècle*) (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004); Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne: de l'honneur et des femmes aux premiers temps mérovingiens* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2001); Bernhard Jussen, *Der Name der Witwe: Erkundungen zur Semantik der mittelalterlichen Bußkultur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Hanz-Werner Goetz, *Frauen im frühen Mittelalter: Frauenbild und Frauenleben im Frankenreich* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1995); Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc* (*VII*e*–X*e *siècle*)*: essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1995); Susanne Wittern, *Frauen, Heiligkeit und Macht: Lateinishe Frauenviten aus dem 4. bis 7. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994); and Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1986).

48 Some preliminary investigations include Eve MacDonald, 'Representations of Women in Sidonius Apollinaris and Gregory of Tours: *Coniuges et reginae*' (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Ottawa, 2000); Brigitte Merta, '*Helena comparanda regina–secunda Isebel*: Darstellungen von Frauen des merowingischen Königshauses in frühmittelalterlichen Quellen', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 96 (1988), 1–32; and Werner Affeldt and Sabine Reiter, 'Die *Historiae* Gregors von Tours als Quelle für die Lebenssituation von Frauen im Frankenreich des sechsten Jahrhunderts', in *Frauen in der Geschichte VII: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Geschichte der Frauen im Frühmittelalter: Methoden – Probleme – Ergebnisse*, ed. by Werner Affeldt and Annette Kuhn (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986), pp. 192–208.

CHAPTER 1

Widowhood

> The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 5:5–6

Introduction

Gregory of Tours believed that the death of a husband, however unfortunate, provided a woman with an opportunity to abandon worldly concerns and devote herself fully to spiritual pursuits. Thus the newly widowed faced a moral choice—a moral test, by which she might gain or lose admission into heaven. Gregory emphasised this choice and detailed its consequences in examples located throughout his works. Difficulties, therefore, confront any attempt to analyse these widows historically. Indeed, several high-status widows mentioned by Gregory deserve scholarly attention for the very reasons that made him uncomfortable: they retained political influence after widowhood by acquiring control over their late husbands' property and by exercising power through children and heirs. Thus, the thematic context in which Gregory presented these women must always be kept in view. So important was Gregory's theme on widowhood that he only deviated from it once: in the very particular case of Queen Brunhild, discussed at length in Chapters 6 and 7 of this study. As we proceed, we will consider those widows who fared badly in Gregory's works (the queens Theudogild, Goiswinth, and the empress Sophia) and those who fared well (Ingoberg, Ultrogotha, and Chlothild; Radegund is discussed in Chapter 3) in relation to the theme of widowhood as a moral test. We will begin with Gregory's principal example of the pious widow: his own mother, Armentaria, whose influence on her son can be detected in many ways: his devotion to the saints, his veneration of their relics, his interest in dreams as divine communication, and even, perhaps, his decision to take up the pen.

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Gregory and Armentaria

Armentaria was born in the first or second decade of the sixth century. In 533 she married a man named Florentius, who was probably much older than her.[1] The union strengthened the ties between two prestigious families: Armentaria was related to no fewer than seven bishops and at least one high ranking Austrasian secular official, while Florentius traced his family's lineage back to Vettius Epagathus, a senator martyred in Lyons in 177.[2] The high-status couple enjoyed property and influence in several areas within the Merovingian kingdoms, especially Burgundy and the Auvergne. They had at least three children, one daughter and two sons—and one of these, probably Gregory himself, was born in or around 538.[3] Florentius died while the children were still young. No date is available, but Gregory only related childhood memories of his father (usually of an illness), and on more than one occasion he described his uncles acting in the role of a father to him.[4] Never remarrying, Armentaria lived most of her life as a widow, and, except for a handful of childhood memories, this is how Gregory knew her. She lived for a long time: her last appearance in the sources dates to 586, when she was probably in (or close to) her 70s. It is even

1 The date depends on the correspondence between the events mentioned in *Historiae*, III. 23, in which King Theudebert took hostages from Arles shortly before his death (in 533), and those mentioned in *Gloria martyrum*, 83, where Gregory stated that, shortly after his marriage, Florentius was among the 'sons of Clermont' taken hostage by the king. Presumably these refer to the same event. The literary parallels between *Historiae*, III. 23 and the story of Attalus in *Historiae*, III. 15, however, might give reason for doubt. The date range for Armentaria's birth and the age gap between her and her husband derive from the other datable events in their lives, discussed subsequently.

2 On Armentaria's relations, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 10–21. On Florentius, see Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel*, p. 176, nr 163. Gregory mentioned his martyred ancestor in *Historiae*, I. 29; *Gloria martyrum*, 48; and *Vita patrum*, VI. 1 (where he notes the familial connection).

3 The year 538 is calculated from information in *Virtutes sancti Martini*, III. 10, which is incidental to the miracle recounted in the passage. According to Bruno Krusch's appendix in *MGH, SRM*, vol. VIII, p. 715, some manuscripts specifically identify Gregory as the child. For another argument that Gregory was born no later than 538, based on his age at ordination, see Monod, *Études critiques*, vol. I, pp. 27–28.

4 In *Vita patrum*, VIII. 2, Gregory recounts how he was being lettered by his maternal granduncle Nicetius in Lyon at the age of eight, while in II. 2 he mentioned that he stayed with his paternal uncle Gallus during an illness in his youth. Gallus died in 551, which is the closest thing to a *terminus ante quem* for Florentius's death that the sources provide. On this, see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 52–53; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 11, 13–14, and 26–29.

possible that she outlived Gregory himself, who died in or around 594, since he never mentioned her death in his works.[5]

Gregory was no doubt close to his mother. He credited her with profoundly influencing his religious thought and practice, and some of his most moving stories are those of his childhood spent at her feet. In one example, Gregory wrote that, as a boy still learning the letters of the alphabet, he dreamed that a man told him to write the name of Joshua, son of Nun, on a piece of wood and place it under his ailing father's pillow.[6] He turned to his mother for help, and she urged him to believe the vision and to follow the instructions faithfully—perhaps she even helped him inscribe the letters. Gregory's father recovered, but a year later he fell ill again. Gregory had another dream in which he was told to use the cure from the Book of Tobit. In the biblical account referenced, the angel Raphael issued instructions on how to administer a cure using the internal organs of a fish, so presumably Gregory thought he had been visited by the angel in his dream. Again, he performed the cure, under his mother's guidance, and his father recovered.[7] It is little surprise that Gregory turned to her in these circumstances, as she had her own personal interest in the interpretation of dreams. A few years earlier, in 543, she had been inspired to observe the feast of St Benignus from vigil to the morning Mass by a foreboding dream in which the wine in the family's cellars turned to blood.[8] Gregory wrote that her act of devotion spared her household from a plague that broke out not long afterward and claimed the lives of her neighbours. If Gregory was indeed born in 538, then his experience of this plague formed one of his earliest memories.

Gregory also shared his mother's devotion to the saints and her belief in the miraculous power of relics, subjects that featured prominently in his writings. Gregory wrote, for example, that Armentaria had obtained the relics of St Eusebius of Vercelli for her oratory, and that these later miraculously prevented her house from burning down when a fire started while she and her

5 Heinzelmann, 'Une source de base de la littérature hagiographique latine', p. 240. The date of Gregory's death is discussed in the Introduction, p. 10.

6 *Gloria confessorum*, 39. For the interpretation of *notae litterarum* as referring to the letters of the alphabet, see Bonnet, *Le latin de Grégoire de Tours*, p. 49; and Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*, p. 191. Bruno Krusch wrote that this phrase referred instead to tachygraphy in his introduction to Gregory's hagiographic works, *MGH, SRM*, vol. I. 2, pp. ix–xxii.

7 See Tobit 6:1–8, 16–17; 8:2–3; 11:2–15. Both dreams are discussed in Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, NY: Catholic University Press, 2000), pp. 83–86. The rationale for the first cure is not as clear, but since 'nun' means 'fish' in Aramaic it may have some connection to the cure from the Book of Tobit.

8 *Gloria martyrum*, 50. See also *Historiae*, IV. 5 and *Vita patrum*, VI. 6.

servants slept.[9] On another occasion, Armentaria called upon the spiritual power of an assortment of relics she kept within a gold medallion to extinguish a fire that had caught in the threshing floors of her estate in the Limagne and spread out of control.[10] The relics, which had originally been collected by Florentius, became an heirloom when Armentaria later passed them down to her son. Thereafter, Gregory carried them with him and made use of their miraculous powers.[11] On one journey, for example, Gregory noticed an ominous thunderstorm in the distance ahead, so he took the medallion from his pocket, raised his hand, and called upon it to fork the storm clouds to either side of his path. The clouds duly obeyed. In recounting this experience, Gregory added: 'In my heart I started to feel as if this wonder happened because of my own personal merits, rather than those of the saints', and so, he humbly added, he was immediately and embarrassingly thrown from his horse.[12] Gregory thus implied that his mother was his spiritual superior, since she had no need for such lessons in modesty.

Gregory also portrayed his mother as especially near to the divine in his account of a miracle that occurred during the feast of St Polycarp. A vessel containing the bread for the Eucharist leapt from the hands of a sinful deacon and danced away from his grasp. Armentaria, together with two other women and a priest, saw the miracle, but not Gregory: 'I must admit that, although I was at this festival, I was not worthy to see the wonder myself'.[13] This story gains significance in light of statements Gregory made elsewhere, in which he made clear that only the spiritually worthy were able to witness certain miracles,[14] a claim that contrasts the view found in some patristic sources, including Augustine of Hippo, that anyone—saint and sinner alike—could see miracles.[15] Gregory's own understanding of miracles probably owed more to his mother's instruction than to patristic tradition, and it seems unlikely he knew

9 *Gloria confessorum*, 3.

10 *Gloria martyrum*, 83.

11 On these relics, see Edward James, 'A Sense of Wonder: Gregory of Tours, Medicine and Science', in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L. T. Bethell*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: Hambeldon Press, 1993), pp. 45–60 (pp. 49–50).

12 *Gloria martyrum*, 83.

13 *Gloria martyrum*, 85.

14 See James, 'A Sense of Wonder', pp. 50–51.

15 Paul Anthony Hayward, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom', in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by James Howard-Johnson and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 15–42. Of course, Gregory may not have been wholly consistent on this point. It should be noted that he,

Augustine's tender description of his own mother Monica in his *Confessions*, or that he used it as his literary model.[16] Instead, Gregory constructed his account of Armentaria, and his views on the proper behaviour of widows, from a mixture of his own personal experiences, contemporary expectations, and biblical precedents (to which we shall return below).[17] We should also add that there remains something irreducibly genuine and personal in Gregory's description of his mother.

Gregory even credited Armentaria with inspiring him to take up the pen. In the prologue to what was probably his first major work, *The Virtues of St Martin*, Gregory described a dream in which he saw various people receiving cures at St Martin's church in Tours, and his mother then told him to put these miracles in writing.[18] Though Gregory referred vaguely to a 'command from the Lord' and to two other dreams, the sense of his account seems to be that his mother (who was then still alive) acted as an otherworldly messenger expressing a command from God.[19] Such a statement is remarkable, even if it drew upon a broader literary tradition of referencing divine messengers (which of course included certain biblical books). Gregory may have been familiar, for example, with the story found in the late fourth-century hagiography on St Martin written by Sulpicius Severus, in which the saint appeared to Sulpicius in a dream smiling and holding a copy of the very hagiography Sulpicius was then completing.[20] In his own vision, Gregory added that Armentaria convinced him to write by arguing that his literary abilities, which he thought were subpar

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like Augustine, thought that supernatural deeds could be preformed by evil people. For him, this indicated demonic influence. See, for example, *Historiae*, x. 25.

16 See Kate Cooper, 'Augustine and Monica', in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400–1400*, ed. by Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 7–20.

17 On Gregory's portrayal of maternal affection, see Jean Verdon, 'Les femmes laïques en Gaule au temps des mérovingiens: les réalités de la vie quotidienne', in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, ed. by Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 239–61 (pp. 252–53).

18 On the *Virtutes sancti Martini* as Gregory's earliest known literary production, see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 124–25 and n. 56. It must have been published in an early form, since Gregory was still adding to this work until 593, as evidenced by the information in *Virtutes sancti Martini*, iv. 37. It is of course possible that Gregory wrote down notes about certain events during the early part of his life and later incorporated these into his publications, as suggested by Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 41–50.

19 The vision is discussed in Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, pp. 85–86; and de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*, pp. 213–17.

20 Sulpicius Severus, *Epistolae*, ii. 3.

and likely to draw ridicule, were actually perfect for reaching a wide audience.[21] Gregory made similar remarks in the introductory passages of his other works, including his *Histories*, and so we must wonder if Armentaria had also inspired these works as well.[22] Gregory's literary output was certainly unusual and thus deserving of explanation. Most of his fellow bishops wrote no more than letters and legal documents. A few produced or commissioned hagiographical works, but hardly anyone in the West, bishop or otherwise, wrote narrative history.[23] The one explanation Gregory himself offered for his literary output was that his mother had urged him on, at God's command.

In light of the influence Armentaria had on Gregory's beliefs, practices, and even his decision to write, it is perhaps little surprise that she appears in his works as a pious widow whose behaviour one should emulate. Gregory's words of praise, however, only form one half of his narrative, for there are many things conspicuously absent—left out as inconsistent with, or at least incidental to, his image of the ideal widow. For example, Gregory said almost nothing about Armentaria's secular affairs. The wealthy, aristocratic, landed, and politically connected Armentaria can only be glimpsed in the accidental details of Gregory's narrative. The miraculous quenching of the fire in the Limagne mentioned above, for example, indicates that Armentaria managed sizeable estates, oversaw many workers, and organised a vast harvesting operation.[24] Similar hints suggest she had estates in Dijon and Lyons as well.[25] Later in life, she appears in Gregory's works resident in Chalon-sur-Saône,[26] an important city that was frequently home to the court of King Guntram.[27] On 4 September 587, as Mass was celebrated for the feast of St Marcellus in the cathedral of

21 Gregory's Latin prose is discussed in the Introduction. Such expressions of humility were commonplace, though it may still be noteworthy that they also appear in the preface to Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*.

22 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 36; Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', p. 39.

23 The general absence of historical narrative in the West from this period (and the few exceptions) is discussed in the Introduction, pp. 11–12.

24 *Gloria martyrum*, 83.

25 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 6–7.

26 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, I. 36, III. 60; *Gloria confessorum*, 84. There has been some disagreement over Gregory's words, '*in terretorium Cavellonensis urbis*', which some have taken to mean Cavaillon, e.g. May Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: Champion, 1976), pp. 73, 76. For the identification in favour of Chalon-sur-Saône, see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p. 283, n. 93; and Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, p. 253, n. 40.

27 For Chalon-sur-Saône as a centre for the court of King Guntram, see *Historiae*, VII. 21, VIII. 10, and IX. 20.

Chalon-sur-Saône, an assassin approached Guntram but then foolishly let his dagger slip from his sleeve, resulting in his capture and confession in front of the whole congregation.[28] Gregory described this dramatic event, but he left his audience to wonder if Armentaria had been in attendance, or if she had talked to him about the incident when he visited her in Chalon-sur-Saône not long after.[29] Gregory characterised his mother as a regular attendee of religious feasts, and he had been happy to describe her as witnessing the aforementioned miracle at the feast of St Polycarp. But it seems he had no such interest in presenting her as a witness to a failed assassination.

Widows in the Merovingian kingdoms normally managed their own estates and acquired the use of some of their late husbands' property, as long as they did not remarry.[30] Though the benefits of this may seem self-evident, Gregory did not think the matter was straightforward—the management of property, like all worldly affairs, had its risks. Gregory wrote, for example, of the aristocratic woman Domnola, who was killed, along with her household, in an ugly dispute over the ownership of a vineyard.[31] Domnola had been widowed but she also remarried, and this may have contributed to Gregory's decision to detail her tragic downfall, since (as we shall see) he did not look favourably upon remarried widows. A woman released from the temporal concerns of marriage and family had little reason to return to a secular life, when she could instead focus exclusively on spiritual pursuits and the life to come. Gregory much preferred the example of Pelagia, the mother of his friend Aridius, who managed the family affairs following her husband's death only so that her son was free to spend his time building churches, acquiring relics, and founding a monastery.[32] Besides funding Aridius's activity with the income from the family estates and personally tending to the needs of the monks, Pelagia also incorporated ascetic practices into her own life. Gregory's portrait aside, one wonders if Pelagia (and Armentaria) had really been so different from Domnola in their concerns. The three probably all faced threats to their property rights. Indeed,

28 *Historiae*, IX. 3. Ironically, there may have been a moment in the liturgy when prayers were made for the welfare of the king.

29 For the visit, see *Historiae*, IX. 20. Gregory also met with Guntram personally and he may have heard the details of the failed assassination from the king himself or his attendants, though it presumably made for awkward conversation at court. There were, of course, other witnesses.

30 See Antti Arjava, 'The Survival of Roman Family Law after the Barbarian Settlements', in *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 33–51 (p. 48); and Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter*, pp. 38–39.

31 *Historiae*, VIII. 32, VIII. 43 (compare with V. 25).

32 *Historiae*, X. 29.

Aridius had abruptly left his position as apprentice to Nicetius, bishop of Trier, upon his father's death to join his mother on the family estates. Gregory presented this as an act of piety, but it probably also had as much to do with the protection of property from disreputable opportunists.

Widows had responsibility for their minor children, and this often developed into informal patronage in adulthood, especially concerning those sons who entered the clergy.[33] At least two of Armentaria's children, Gregory and his brother Peter, pursued ecclesiastical careers, and they must have benefited from her support, both financially and politically, though Gregory had remarkably little to say about it. Gregory, for example, seems to have relied on Armentaria in securing his post as bishop of Tours in 573. The circumstances are unclear, but, as has been cautiously reconstructed by Raymond van Dam, Gregory apparently faced local opposition immediately upon his appointment.[34] He had been chosen by the king, rather than by the people of the city, consecrated at Reims, rather than in Tours (as the canons required), and, conspicuously, he delayed journeying to Tours to assume his new post for two months.[35] When he finally did set off, he stopped first at the shrine of St Julian in Brioude and tore off some of the fringe covering the saint's tomb to use as a relic. He clearly wished to muster all the support he could. Conspicuously, Armentaria joined Gregory in Tours for a few months following his initial assumption of the post.[36] Gregory was vague about her activities, writing only that she had arrived 'for the sake of my need' (*causa desiderii me*), but her presence in the city must have provided Gregory with more than just

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33 Antti Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 89–94.

34 Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 63–66; also Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 10–13.

35 For Gregory's consecration, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, V. 3. On the relevant canons, and the frequency with witch they were ignored, see Paul Fouracre, 'Why Were So Many Bishops Killed in Merovingian Francia?', repr. in Paul Fouracre, *Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), article V (p. 24); Wood, 'The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont', pp. 42–43; Reinhold Kaiser, 'Königtum und Bischofsherrschaft im frühmittelalterlichen Neustrien', in *Herrschaft und Kirche: Beiträge zur Entstehung und Wirkungsweise episkopaler und monastischer Organisationsformen*, ed. by Friedrich Prinz (Stuttgart: Hiersmann, 1988), pp. 83–108 (pp. 86–90); and Jean Gaudemet, *Les élections dans l'Église latine des origines au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Lanore, 1979), pp. 56–62. For Gregory's stop at Brioude, see *Passio et virtutes sancti Iuliani*, 34. The local opposition seems to have endured, culminating in an attempt to oust Gregory from his post in 580, discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 152–53.

36 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, III. 10.

emotional support. She was, after all, related to most of the former bishops of the city.[37]

Only the year before, Gregory's brother Peter had experienced his own difficulties while pursuing his ecclesiastical career. Serving as a deacon in Langres, he found himself accused of murder when a local clergyman named Sylvester died from a seizure of the brain. Sylvester had been expecting to become the next bishop of the see, and the implication was that Peter, driven by his ambition, had resorted to witchcraft in order to remove a rival, positioning himself to be considered for the post instead.[38] Peter found it necessary to travel to Lyons and clear himself of these accusations before an ecclesiastical tribunal overseen by the local bishop, Nicetius. Gregory did not mention Armentaria in this context, but it is difficult to believe that she was totally uninvolved, as she was related to almost everyone in question: Sylvester was a close relation, perhaps even a sibling,[39] Nicetius was her uncle,[40] and the previous bishop of Langres had also been her uncle.[41] Indeed, she was related to several of the see's former occupants, much as was the case with Tours.[42] One naturally wonders if Armentaria had asked Nicetius to resolve what was essentially a family drama.[43] She had sought his help once before, when she had asked him to mentor a young Gregory, probably following her husband's death.[44] Yet Gregory said nothing of his mother's involvement. He simply noted, in all brevity, that the dispute ended in tragedy two years later, when Sylvester's son, clearly displeased with what he regarded as an injustice, took matters into his own hands and attacked Peter on the street and killed him with a spear. Gregory also

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37 Gregory wrote that he was related to all but five of the former bishops of Tours, including his immediate predecessor, Euphronius, who was a maternal relation; see *Historiae*, IV. 15 and V. 49. His relations to the remaining bishops cannot be identified with certainty (except to exclude Martin of Tours from the list); see Mathisen, 'The Family of Georgius Florentius Gregorius'.

38 *Historiae*, V. 5.

39 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, p. 15, nr 10.

40 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, p. 20, nr 18.

41 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 16–17, nr 13.

42 On Langres as a family bishopric, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, III. 2; with Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit*, vol. I, pp. 163–65.

43 On the dispute as a family drama, see Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', pp. 40–41.

44 *Vita patrum*, VIII. 2; *Passio et virtutes sancti Iuliani*, 2; *Gloria confessorum*, 61. For an interpretation that, in contrast, downplays Nicetius's role in Gregory's upbringing, see Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 30–37.

added that Peter's murderer ultimately got what he deserved, struck down in a separate dispute after living as a fugitive for a few years.

Gregory's silence about Armentaria in this story is understandable given its sad conclusion. Gregory omitted other details, like the name of Sylvester's nefarious son (who was his own relative, possibly his first cousin). But it is not an isolated case: Gregory regularly passed over Armentaria's involvement in worldly affairs. The Armentaria of Gregory's works had estates but she was never burdened with their management; she had political connections but she never needed them; she had servants but she never reprimanded them. Her daughter was married, perhaps to the *comes* of Tours—as the surviving parent, Armentaria must have played a role in arranging the union, but there is no hint of it in Gregory's works.[45] These and other examples indicate that Gregory had little interest in detailing this side of his mother's activities. He reduced her life to her spiritual pursuits. Not that this involved fabrication; Venantius Fortunatus also praised Armentaria for her religious devotion.[46] Nor that it was insincere; Armentaria clearly influenced her son and his spiritual formation profoundly. But Gregory's omissions do point to something deeper: he held sharp views on the proper conduct of widows and he allowed these to shape his material accordingly. Widowhood, for all its potential sorrows, provided a woman with an opportunity to turn away from worldly concerns and focus instead on spiritual perfection. Gregory had little sympathy for those who fell short and occupied themselves with secular affairs.

The Wrong Path: Theudogild, Goiswinth, and Sophia

If one were to look through Gregory's works for Armentaria's opposite, Theudogild would be a good place to start. She appears in one passage in the *Histories* as a widow who made poor choices and suffered the consequences.[47] Theudogild had risen from her humble origins as a shepherd's daughter to become King Charibert's queen, and when he died she sought another royal

45 Gregory mentioned the marriage in *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 2 and *Gloria martyrum*, 70. The association with the *comes* of Tours is conjectural (both men were named Justinus); see Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie der merowingischen Amtsträger*, pp. 119–20, nr 129. Another of Gregory's relatives (his mother's uncle), Gundulf, had served as a *dux* in Sigibert's kingdom (*Historiae*, VI. 11, 26), so there were already family connections to the Austrasian elite.

46 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 15.

47 *Historiae*, IV. 26.

spouse, offering herself to her late husband's brother, Guntram. Unimpressed with this decision, Gregory recounted Theudogild's sad fate: Guntram feigned acceptance of her offer, then robbed her of her wealth and forced her into a monastery in Arles.[48] The king knew to prey upon Theudogild's pride, announcing: 'I will take her in marriage and make her great among the populace, so that she shall enjoy more honour with me than she had with my brother'. Gregory also had Guntram utter a justification for his deceit: 'It is proper that her treasure should belong to me, rather than to a woman who was unworthy (*indigna*) to approach my brother's bed'. By putting these words into Guntram's mouth, Gregory intended not only to call attention to the king's hypocrisy (for he too had taken girls of humble birth to bed),[49] but also to emphasise Theudogild's unworthiness per se. She had only risen in status because she had caught Charibert's eye. Now as a widow of considerable means, she had no legitimate reason to offer herself to a king for further material gain, rather than quietly pursue spiritual rewards on her own accord. And, ironically, she ended up in a convent all the same. Even within the walls of a religious institution, however, Theudogild refused to give up her worldly ambitions, offering herself in marriage to 'a certain Goth' (*quidam Gothus*) if he agreed to take her with him to the Visigothic kingdom. Theudogild's abbess discovered the plot and ordered the former queen to be beaten and placed in confinement. As Gregory abruptly concluded, 'she lived there until the end of her earthly life, worn down by no ordinary sufferings'.[50] As we shall see, Gregory regarded the Visigoths as vile heretics and their kingdom as a land of iniquity, so Theudogild's final, disgraceful marriage proposal was akin to her selling her soul, her punishments a foretaste of those in the life to come.[51]

The Visigoths suffered Gregory's disdain partly due to the reputation of their queen, Goiswinth—a remarried widow who was presented in the *Histories* as

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48 This was presumably Caesaria's convent of St John, which practised a strict form of monastic seclusion (discussed in Chapter 3, p. 74). On the identification, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 38–39.

49 See *Historiae*, IV. 25, discussed further in Chapter 4, pp. 91–93.

50 *Historiae*, IV. 26.

51 For Gregory's views on the Visigoths, see also Edward James, 'Gregory of Tours and Arianism', in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 327–38; Edward James, 'Gregory of Tours, the Visigoths and Spain', in *Cross, Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in Memory of Richard Fletcher*, ed. by Simon Barton and Peter Linehan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 43–64; and Walter Goffart, 'Foreigners in the Histories of Gregory of Tours', repr. in Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 275–91 (pp. 285–86).

a wicked, cruel, and iniquitous tyrant. Unlike Theudogild, Goiswinth appears in other sources, which offer rather different interpretations of the queen. According to Gregory, she inflicted a 'great persecution' (*magna persecutio*) upon Catholics in her kingdom in 579. 'Many were driven into exile, robbed of their belongings, withered by starvation, thrown into prison, scourged by the lash, or driven to death by torture', he wrote, in language that called to mind the infamous persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor Diocletian recounted earlier in the *Histories*.[52] Gregory blamed Goiswinth, rather than the king or anyone else, as the 'head of this great crime' (*caput* [...] *huius sceleris*). In the same breath, Gregory noted, curiously, that Goiswinth had been married to two kings, first to Athanagild and then to Leovigild, before asserting that God had marked her as a reprobate by obscuring the colour and light from one of her eyes. Gregory's reference to Goiswinth's marriages might at first seem an odd digression in this context, especially since he had already given these details earlier in the *Histories*.[53] Given his sharp opinions about widowhood and remarriage, however, Gregory surely expected his audience to understand this as a mark against her that deserved mention alongside the others.

Gregory's diatribe reached its crescendo with his description of Goiswinth abusing her own granddaughter, Ingund. Born in Merovingian Gaul, Ingund married the Visigothic prince Hermenegild, a son of Goiswinth's second husband, yet she refused abandon the Catholicism of her upbringing upon joining her Visigothic family. Enraged, Goiswinth grabbed Ingund by the hair, dashed her head against the ground, and kicked her until, bleeding, she was stripped and forced into an Arian baptismal font. Gregory's near hagiographic account is difficult to take at face value, not least because, throughout the brutal ordeal, he had Ingund unflinchingly profess a perfectly formed orthodox confession of faith in the consubstantial Trinity. Scholarship has been equally sceptical of Gregory's claim that Goiswinth's 'great persecution' left only a few (*pauci*) Catholics in her kingdom.[54] Indeed, according to the Lusitanian born chronicler John of Biclaro, Leovigild convoked a synod in 580 that disavowed

52 *Historiae*, V. 38. Diocletian's persecution appears in *Historiae*, I. 35.

53 *Historiae*, IV. 38.

54 *Historiae*, VI. 18. See Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409–711* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 58–62; Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400–1000*, 2nd edn (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 50–53; E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 78–87; and Knut Schäferdiek, *Die Kirche in den Reichen der Westgoten und Suewen bis zur Errichtung der westgotischen katholischen Staatskirche* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), pp. 165–79.

rebaptism in favour of the laying on of hands.[55] Yet Gregory saw the persecution and forced baptism of Catholic girls as something like an Iberian tradition. Two generations before Ingund, another Merovingian princess had suffered abuse from her Visigothic husband, Amalaric, for refusing to change creeds.[56] And in the days when the Iberian peninsula had been ruled by Vandal kings, a young senatorial girl had been forced into the Arian baptismal font by King Thrasamund, while she defiantly professed her Trinitarian beliefs.[57] Gregory even claimed that the springs in Iberia ran dry on the day the Arians celebrated Easter, but overflowed on the day of the Catholic Easter, which truly left Thrasamund, Amalaric, and Goiswinth with no excuse.[58]

John of Biclaro serves as a useful balance to Gregory's information, and not simply regarding the issue of forced baptisms, since he mentioned Queen Goiswinth directly on a few occasions in his *Chronicle*. Although John also regarded her as untrustworthy and politically dangerous, he differed from Gregory in his tone, which was not as venomous. Goiswinth appeared in his *Chronicle* as a committed Arian, but not as a new Diocletian. Interestingly, the *Chronicle* also recorded that Goiswinth had supported her stepson Hermenegild when he revolted against his father (her second husband) Leovigild.[59] This is important because Gregory also mentioned Hermenegild's revolt, devoting much space to it in his *Histories*, but without any reference

55 John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 580, ed. by Julio Campos, *Juan De Biclaro* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1960). The biographical information for John of Biclaro appears in Isidore of Seville, *De viris illustribus*, 44. The place where John founded a monastery, *Biclarum*, is unidentified. His chronicle was written while he was bishop of Girona in Catalonia. John's information is preferable to the conflicting statements of Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, 50. See Karl Friedrich Stroheker, 'Leovigild', repr. in Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Germanentum und Spätantike* (Zurich: Artemis, 1965), pp. 134–91 (pp. 173–75); and Schäferdiek, *Die Kirche in den Reichen der Westgoten und Suewen*, pp. 159–64. Gregory's statements in *Historiae*, VI. 18 hint that he may have been aware of Leovigild's efforts.

56 *Historiae*, III. 10. This story appears in Gregory's account of a campaign led by Childebert I against the Visigoths, which is problematic in its details; see Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, pp. 11–12; and Roger Collins, 'Isidore, Maximus and the *Historia Gothorum*', in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1994), pp. 345–58 (pp. 355–57).

57 *Historiae*, II. 2.

58 *Historiae*, V. 17, VI. 43, and X. 24. Gregory also wrote that the Visigoths were accustomed to flee from battle (II. 37), to betray those under their protection (II. 27), and to kill their kings at their whimsy (III. 30).

59 John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 579; with Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, pp. 47–49.

to Goiswinth.[60] In Gregory's version of events, Hermenegild had been convinced by his wife, the aforementioned Ingund, to convert from Arianism to Catholicism, which caused his father to turn against him. Though not intent on presenting Hermenegild as a hero,[61] Gregory was committed to viewing the rebellion as a sectarian conflict between Catholics and Arians, and this led him to distort or omit several inconvenient details. Thus, scholarship has demonstrated that Hermenegild actually converted to Catholicism *after* he began his revolt, contradicting Gregory's claim that the conversion caused the conflict.[62] Similarly, the Catholic king of Galicia, Miro, had sided with the Arian Leovigild, while Gregory wrote that Miro had allied with Hermenegild. Gregory's interpretation of events simply could not accommodate the fact that Goiswinth, supreme Arian heretic and head of the great persecution, gave her support to the Catholic Hermenegild.

Nonetheless, John of Biclaro echoed Gregory in describing Goiswinth as a politically underhanded woman—one who plotted not only against Leovigild but also, as we shall see, his successor Reccared. Venantius Fortunatus, however, gave a wholly different interpretation of the queen in a poem he wrote on the sudden and tragic death of her daughter, Galswinth.[63] Fortunatus presented Goiswinth as a caring mother, who was sad to see her daughter leave for Gaul upon her betrothal to the Merovingian king Chilperic, and who was

60 *Historiae*, v. 38, vi. 43, viii. 28.

61 Gregory was reluctant to glorify Hermenegild because he thought patricide was unjustified under any circumstance, even for a son at war with a heretical father. See *Historiae*, vi. 43 and compare with iii. 28, where Gregory borrowed a phrase from Proverbs 1:18 against the killing of a kinsman. Gregory returned to the subject in *Historiae*, iv. 20, where he drew upon the relevant biblical material of 2 Samuel 15–18, 2 Kings 18, and Psalm 79:15. Others were prepared to describe Hermenegild as a hero and martyr; see Amy Fuller, 'Rebel with a Cause? From Traitor Prince to Exemplary Martyr: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's Representation of San Hermenegildo', *European Review of History*, 16 (2009), 893–910.

62 See Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', pp. 254–61; Roger Collins, 'Merida and Toledo, 550–585', in *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, ed. by Edward James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 189–219 (pp. 215–17); and Walter Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius ii and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald', *Traditio*, 13 (1957), 73–118.

63 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, vi. 5. On the poem, see Michael Roberts, 'Venenatius Fortunatus' Elegy on the Death of Galswintha (Carm. 6. 5)', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 298–312; and Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 96–101. It is not possible to date the work.

distraught to hear of her daughter's untimely death.[64] Fortunatus clearly expected his audience to have sympathy for Goiswinth, and he was by no means forced to use her to represent sorrow and grief: other figures in the poem were equally suitable, including Galswinth's nurse, who, in the analysis of Judith George, served the literary function of a 'mother-substitute' once the princess had set off on her journey.[65] Fortunatus gave no hint that Goiswinth was an evil queen, least of all one capable of abusing her granddaughter/stepdaughter Ingund for the sake of the Arian religion. Fortunatus, instead, made Goiswinth the voice of sublime lamentations that called to mind passages from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius's *Achilleid* (among others classical allusions):[66]

> Did I feel the gentle love of a daughter
> only so that a great wound might open my flesh?
>
> If now our light goes out, if a daughter slips away,
> why, O spiteful life, are you holding me by these tears?
>
> O callous death, you have made a great mistake: you should
> have buried the mother, yet you claimed the daughter instead.
>
> If only the rivers had overflowed their banks
> and the land turned into a flooded marsh,
>
> or if the peaks of the Pyrenees had risen to the stars,
> or its passages frozen over with sheets of ice.

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64 Fortunatus passed over the circumstances of Galswinth's death. Gregory wrote that she had been murdered by her husband, Chilperic (*Historiae*, IV. 28), as discussed in Chapter 4, p. 96. The reasons for Fortunatus's silence have proved to be a matter of contention. See, for example, the explanations of Dominique Tardi, *Fortunat: étude sur un dernier représentant de la poésie latine dans le Gaule mérovingienne* (Paris: Boivin, 1927), p. 108 (Fortunatus considered the subject too sensitive to mention); Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes*, 3 vols (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2002–04), vol. III, pp. xliii–xliv (Fortunatus was unsure about the details); and Wilhelm Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus: Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1901), p. 120 (Gregory fabricated his account). Meyer probably had it right.

65 George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 98.

66 On the classical allusions, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 98–99.

when I released you, Galswinth, to the northern lands,
so that, neither by wheel nor waterway, could waggon set forth.

Was this what my anxious mind foresaw,
when I could not let my daughter go?[67]

Goiswinth's motherly sorrow was only assuaged by her conviction that Galswinth was among the saints in heaven, as Fortunatus had her declare: 'My fellow Christians, trust that she is alive, because she believed; such tears ought not be shown for someone who has obtained paradise.'[68] Since Galswinth was apparently already regarded as a saint in Gaul,[69] Fortunatus may simply have been telling his audience what it expected to hear. But his decision to use Goiswinth as a mouthpiece to profess Galswinth's sanctity indicates he did not regard their difference in creed to be a source of conflict. Neither did he regard this difference as an obstacle for his audience, since, earlier in his poem, he had referenced Galswinth conversion to Catholicism upon her marriage, thus openly admitting that Goiswinth was not herself a Catholic.[70]

Though the portraits painted by Fortunatus and Gregory are strikingly different, they have a similar background: Goiswinth was a distant and poorly known figure in Gaul, so she offered each author a blank canvas with which to work. Their accounts, therefore, represent their literary and thematic needs, working without the constraint of an informed audience expecting historicity. Gregory wished to present politically active widows in negative terms, and this dovetailed nicely with his disdain for Goiswinth's Arianism. Fortunatus, conversely, needed a sympathetic figure, and he was not hindered by sectarian concerns. John of Biclaro, therefore, may well be the most reliable of this trio, though his laconic references present their own difficulties. Goiswinth was clearly an important figure in the second half of the sixth century. Married to two kings—Athanagild in her youth and then Leovigild in either her late 30s or early 40s—she had managed to succeed where Theudogild had failed.[71] At the

67 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 5, lines 321–34.

68 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 5, lines 351–70 (quotation is of the final lines).

69 This is suggested by Gregory's account of a miracle that occurred at her tomb in the *Historiae*, IV. 28.

70 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 5, line 245.

71 It is difficult to estimate the dates for Goiswinth's career, but since her daughters Brunhild and Galswinth were married at a fairly young age in the mid-560s, and since she lived until c. 590, she was probably born in the early 530s or late 520s. She married Leovigild following her first husband's death in 568 (see John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 569; and Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, 47).

time of her second marriage, c. 568–72, she must have had substantial political and financial assets, and as Athanagild's widow she may also have acted as a symbol of legitimacy and political continuity for Leovigild, who began his rule only as a coregent of his brother, Liuva.[72] Gregory probably viewed Goiswinth's enduring influence as a mark against her, noting with a certain disdain that, following Leovigild's death in 586, she entered into a pact with his son and successor, Reccared, who 'took her as his own mother' (*eamque ut matrem suscepit*).[73] It is only John of Biclaro, however, who knew that she turned on Reccared shortly before her death because she was uncomfortable with his conversion of the realm to Catholicism in 587.[74]

The same year as the conversion of Reccared's kingdom, another woman who featured prominently in the *Histories* became a widow, the Byzantine empress Sophia. As with Goiswinth, Gregory presented Sophia as an overly ambitious and immoral tyrant. Yet he did so only after her husband, Justin II, who suffered bouts of insanity from 572,[75] relinquished the daily oversight of imperial affairs to a high court official named Tiberius two years later.[76] With Justin no longer mentally competent, Gregory viewed this moment as if it were the beginning of Sophia's widowhood, since she had the opportunity to step away from political life. Lamentably, Sophia clung to her influence at court to the detriment of the empire and its rightful governor, Tiberius, a pious man beloved by the populace. Scholarship has taken interest in Gregory's laudatory portrayal of Tiberius, since few other rulers enjoyed unequivocal praise in the *Histories*, but emphasis has almost exclusively been given to the juxtaposition of the good and orthodox Tiberius with Justin the heretical, avaricious, and petty despot.[77] This interpretation is certainly right, but it stands

72 John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 568; Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, 48.

73 *Historiae*, IX. 1.

74 John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 589.

75 On Justin II's insanity and death, including the dates, see Bernard Bachrach and Jerome Kroll, 'Justin's Madness: Weak-Mindedness or Organic Psychosis', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 48 (1993), 40–67; and Ewald Kislinger, 'Der kranke Justin II. und die ärzliche Haftung bei Operation in Byzanz', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantistik*, 36 (1986), 39–44.

76 *Historiae*, V. 19. See Averil Cameron, 'An Emperor's Abdication', *Byzantinoslavica*, 37 (1976), 161–71.

77 See Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 221–24; Walter Goffart, 'Conspicuously Absent: Martial Heroism in the Histories of Gregory of Tours and its Likes', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 365–93 (p. 374); Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 48–54, 126–27; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 233–35, 249–54; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours

to be enriched by the observation that, following Justin's incapacitation and subsequent death, Sophia took on the role of antagonist in the narrative of the *Histories*. Moreover, Gregory laboured to achieve this portrayal: as we shall see, contemporary sources from the East question the claim that Tiberius and Sophia locked horns as committed adversaries and moral antitheses.[78]

Gregory regarded Sophia's enduring political influence as illegitimate and harmful for the realm. Thus, when Tiberius diverted substantial resources for the relief of the poor, Sophia rebuked him for his foolhardy generosity: 'What has taken me many years to accumulate, you dispense in a moment of wastefulness'. Tiberius chastised Sophia for her worldliness and quoted from the gospels: 'Hoard your treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth destroy, where thieves neither steal nor plunder'.[79] Tiberius trusted in a higher authority and he found his reward. Miraculously, he discovered a hoard of coins under the floor of his palace, beneath three successive marble tiles inscribed with a cross. 'The Lord provided him with more and more', Gregory wrote, because he was 'a true and great Christian' (*magnus et verus Christianus*). When Justin II finally died, Tiberius acquired outright control of the empire, but, according to Gregory, this brought him no reprieve from Sophia's political ambitions, as she conspired with her late husband's nephew to see Tiberius ousted from power.[80] After thwarting this *coup d'état*, Tiberius confiscated Sophia's wealth and placed her under house arrest. Yet her scheming was not finished. In 582, as Tiberius searched for a successor, Sophia slyly recommended a certain Maurice in the hopes that she could marry him and return to prominence at court, but Tiberius outsmarted her one final time, arranging for his own daughter Constantina to marry Maurice instead, just before his death.[81]

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and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 2 (1968), 31–44 (p. 34); Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 96–98; and Averil Cameron, 'Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*: Two Case Histories', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 3 (1977), 1–17. For Justin II's avarice and rumoured 'Pelagianism', see *Historiae*, IV. 40.

78 For a reconstruction of Sophia's career, see Averil Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion*, 45 (1975), 5–21; and Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 40–58.

79 *Historiae*, V. 19. Compare with Matthew 6:20 and Luke 12:33.

80 *Historiae*, V. 30.

81 *Historiae*, VI. 30. Sophia faded from Gregory's narrative at this point, though she lived for many more years, beyond Gregory's own lifetime. In her last recorded act, she gave a gift to Maurice on the Easter of 601; see Theophanes, *Chronographia*, anno mundi 6093.

Sources from the East reveal just how much Gregory laboured to produce his image of Sophia. He took care to present her, for example as enthralled by worldly objectives, in contrast to the pious Tiberius; unknown to his audience, the empress had converted from the Monophysite heresy to Chalcedonian orthodoxy.[82] The Sophia of the *Histories* knew only greed, not charity, but in 567 she had summoned the moneylenders of Constantinople and absolved all outstanding debts.[83] Gregory thought an enduring hatred for Tiberius enflamed Sophia, yet, according to John of Ephesus, she had acted with the senate and Justin II (in a moment of lucidity) and chosen Tiberius to be the governor of the realm herself.[84] Evagrius Scholasticus also credited Sophia and Justin with the decision jointly.[85] Far from regarding Sophia's political influence as illegitimate, Byzantine art, coinage, and diplomatic materials from the period make clear that she had always been a prominent figure at court, before Justin II gained the throne, during his rule, and after his incapacitation.[86] The pair were 'the two lights of the world', in the words of the poet Corippus.[87] Indeed, Sophia was the niece of Theodora, wife of the late emperor Justinian I, and her marriage to Justin had bestowed a sense of legitimacy and continuity with the past upon her husband's rule.[88]

Gregory may not have known all of these details, but the shape of his narrative fits too precisely with his broader theme on widowhood and piety to be the result of mere ignorance. He had ample opportunity to corroborate his information with the Byzantine envoys who frequented the royal courts of Gaul, as well as pilgrims returning from the East.[89] For example, Gregory conversed at length with an eastern bishop named Simon, who came to Tours

82 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, II. 10–12. The genuineness of this conversion has been questioned, but Sophia and Justin II certainly worked to spread Chalcedonian orthodoxy during their reign.

83 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, anno mundi 6060.

84 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, III. 5.

85 Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, V. 13. On Tiberius as Sophia's choice, see Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, p. 51; and Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), pp. 64 and 68.

86 See Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', pp. 10–11; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 40–42; and James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, pp. 64, 68.

87 Corippus, *In laudem Justini Augusti minoris*, II. 171–72, ed. by Serge Antès, *Corippe: Eloge de l'empereur Justin II* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1981).

88 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, II. 10.

89 On Gregory's sources for events in Byzantium, see Yitzhak Hen, 'Gregory of Tours and the Holy Land', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 61 (1995), 47–64; and Averil Cameron, 'The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 26 (1975), 421–26.

in 591.[90] Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory's friend and associate, certainly kept up with events in the East, and he had even obtained a copy of Corippus's aforementioned poem.[91] Fortunatus praised Sophia for her piety and for donating a fragment of the Cross of the Crucifixion to a convent in Poitiers (discussed in Chapter 3), comparing her to Helena, the mother of the first Christian emperor, who was believed, wrongly, to have discovered the Cross when she visited Jerusalem in the late 320s.[92] Without doubt Gregory knew about this donation, as he had seen the relic and witnessed its miraculous power on a visit to Poitiers.[93] In his *Glory of the Martyrs*, moreover, Gregory noted that the relic had been a gift from the East without ever crediting Sophia, even though he mentioned her in this very passage in a unrelated digression.

Gregory's disdain for Sophia, as with the other bad widows in his works, derived from her political involvement *after* her opportunity to abandon worldly concerns—not before. Although Sophia ruled jointly with her husband for many years, Gregory chose the onset of Justin's infirmity as the moment when she faced her moral test. Thenceforth 'the empire was ruled by Empress Sophia alone'.[94] Before this key event, as we have seen, Justin remained the sole object of Gregory's critique—a greedy and corrupt ruler juxtaposed with the charitable and benevolent Tiberius.[95] Indeed, as long as Justin enjoyed a sound mind, Gregory kept Sophia out of sight. He had done the same with Goiswinth, recounting the reign of her first husband, Athanagild, without detailing her activities.[96] In fact on this Gregory remained completely silent: Goiswinth only

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90 *Historiae*, IV. 40–41; X. 24. Among other things, Simon told Gregory about the fall of Antioch and Apamea to the Persians in the early 570s, a conflict which had resulted from Justin and Sophia's decision to cease payments to the rival empire. Admittedly, Gregory only met with Simon late in his life, and in *Historiae*, IV. 40 he mistakenly located Antioch in Egypt, though in X. 24 he more accurately placed the city in or near Armenia. On the conflict with Persia and its causes, see Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, V. 1 and V. 8–9; and John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, V. 20.

91 See Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51–67 (p. 61).

92 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix 2. On Helena and the Cross, see Jan Willem Drijvers, 'Helena Augusta. The Cross and the Myth: Some New Reflections', *Millennium*, 8 (2011), 125–74. Justin and Sophia apparently gave a similar gift to the bishop of Rome; see Sabine G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 84–85 and pl. 24.

93 *Gloria martyrum*, 5; see also *Historiae*, IX. 40.

94 *Historiae*, V. 19.

95 *Historiae*, IV. 40.

96 Gregory mentioned Athanagild's reign in *Historiae*, IV. 8. Goiswinth appeared briefly in IV. 38 and then properly in V. 38.

appeared in the *Histories* as a widow. Similarly, Gregory focused his criticism of Theudogild on her behaviour as a widow, rather than her time at Charibert's side. Thus, while Gregory may well have had reservations about politically influential women in general, he did not present such opinions as a theme in his works. He focused instead on widowhood and excused a woman's involvement in secular affairs while she remained married and producing children. Perhaps he realised she had rather little say during this period of her life. But the death of her husband (or his mental incapacitation) offered her a choice, and so Gregory held widows to account at this moment and thereafter. Those who failed earned his rebuke, while those who succeeded earned his praise.

Righteous Widows: Ingoberg, Ultrogotha, and Chlothild

Gregory may have criticised Theudogild for her conduct following Charibert's death, but he praised another of the late king's wives, lauding the widowed Ingoberg as 'a very prudent woman, especially gifted in the religious life, diligent in her vigils, prayers, and almsgiving'.[97] Gregory even suggested that she received a divine forewarning about her death in 589, which led her to seek his assistance in drafting her will. Gregory's regard for Ingoberg was surely enhanced by her choice of beneficiaries, which included St Martin's church and the cathedral in Tours. But he may also have been impressed by her lack of interest in politics. Indeed, she had long kept away from the circles of power, pushed aside while her husband still lived by a series of women with worldly ambitious who managed to catch his eye.[98] Gregory had little to say about Ingoberg for the twenty-two years between her husband's death in 567 and the drafting of her will, mentioning only that her daughter was married to a prince in Kent.[99] Even here, Gregory was unnecessarily vague: he surely must have known the name of the girl (Bertha) and probably the name of her husband (Æthelberht),[100] though he failed to mention them. Perhaps Gregory felt

97 *Historiae*, IX. 26.

98 *Historiae*, IV. 26.

99 *Historiae*, IV. 26 and IX. 26.

100 The names are known from Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I. 25–26, II. 3, and II. 5. 'Bertha' is probably only part of her name, since Merovingian women normally had names with two elements. See Eugen Ewig, 'Die Namengebung bei den ältesten Frankenkönigen und im merowingischen Königshaus', *Francia*, 18 (1991), 21–69.

uncomfortable with the union of a Catholic girl to a pagan prince,[101] especially since Ingoberg may well have played a role in arranging it.[102] The story would certainly have been easier to tell after Æthelberht's baptism, which was clearly on the cards in the early 590s but did not actually take place until after Gregory's death.[103] Had he lived a while longer, Gregory may have detailed how the holy Ingoberg assisted her daughter in the conversion of Æthelberht and his kingdom, which, instead, can only be pieced together from other

101 Although Bede's chronology held that Æthelberht had died in 616 after ruling for fifty-six years, Gregory was surely right to describe him as a prince in 589 (in the context of Ingoberg drafting her will). See Ian Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 1–17 (pp. 10–11). If Bede's 'fifty-six years' are taken to indicate anything, they may represent a confusion with Æthelberht's lifespan, which would place his birth in 561; see Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), p. 6.

102 Bede wrote that Bertha had been sent to Kent *a parentibus*, often translated as 'by her parents', though it might also mean 'by her relatives' more generally. Indeed, her father Charibert, who died in 567, was probably no longer living when the marriage was arranged, since it seems Æthelberht was too young to take a wife until after the 560s. (As noted above, Æthelberht died in 616, so, if he had been old enough to take a wife during Charibert's lifetime, then he must have lived well into his 60s or beyond, which seems unlikely.) If the marriage occurred after Charibert's death, then Ingoberg's involvement in arranging it may have been significant, since Bertha's political value would not have been high enough for the reigning kings to have taken a leading role in finding her a husband. See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 176–80. Because this interpretation assumes Æthelberht was born in the early 560s (above) and died in his 50s, it follows that Ingoberg was probably ten to twenty years older than her husband, since her mother had been born c. 519 (*Historiae*, IX. 26). I do not find this surprising, especially since the Merovingians were by far the superior party, but it proved to be too much for Kai Peter Hilchenbach, *Das vierte Buch der Historien von Gregor von Tours: Edition mit sprachwissenschaftlichen-textkritischem und historischem Kommentar*, 2 vols (Bern: Lang, 2009), vol. II, pp. 534–35, n. 201, who could not imagine Æthelberht accepting a bride older than himself.

103 Æthelberht was baptised by Augustine of Canterbury, sometime after he had been sent to Kent by Pope Gregory I in 596, probably a year or two after Gregory of Tours died. Æthelberht, however, had been open to the spread of Christianity within his kingdom for several years prior to this. See Ian Wood, 'Some Historical Reidentifications and the Christianization of Kent', in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. by Guyda Armstrong and I. N. Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 27–35; and Rob Meens, 'A Background to Augustine's Mission to Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 5–17. Of course, the Merovingian kingdoms and the papacy were not the only sources of Christian influence in Kent, as groups within the local British population had practiced the religion since the Roman period.

sources.[104] Lacking an ending that fit his otherwise laudatory account of a woman who had spent her widowhood in acts of piety, Gregory chose to remain silent about an inconvenient detail in Ingoberg's life.

Gregory also had flattering words for the widowed queen Ultrogotha, whose husband Childebert I died in 558. In his work on *The Virtues of St Martin*, Gregory compared a pilgrimage Ultrogotha undertook to St Martin's church to the biblical example of the Queen of Sheba seeking Solomon's wisdom.[105] Ultrogotha fasted and gave alms before her arrival to Martin's shrine. Her fear and respect for the saint kept her from approaching his tomb too closely. She kept vigils throughout the night, prayed, and wept. At Mass the following day, she was rewarded by witnessing three blind men receive a miraculous cure—an event that recalls Gregory's account of his mother at the feast of St Polycarp, discussed above. Though Gregory did not indicate when Ultrogotha made her pilgrimage, it probably occurred after she and her daughters had been banished from Paris upon her husband's death by his successor, Chlothar I.[106] This exile ended after Chlothar himself died in 561, when, according to Venantius Fortunatus, King Charibert placed Ultrogotha under his protection and granted her a an opulent garden in Paris next to St Vincent's church, which served as her late husband's mausoleum (and in which she, too, was later buried).[107] Gregory's stories about Ultrogotha are consistent with other traditions: she was remembered as a saint in the *Life of Balthild*;[108] the monks of St Peter's in Arles prayed for her in their liturgy;[109] and the Council of Orléans (549) recorded her foundation of a hospice (*xenodochium*) in Lyons in its decrees.[110] Yet Gregory may have overlooked other aspects of her legacy, since the *Life of Samson of Dol* remembered her as a wicked queen who threatened the life of its saintly protagonist.[111]

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104 See Martin Werner, 'The Liudhard Medalet', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), 27–42 (especially p. 33). It is possible that Ingoberg asked Gregory to help her daughter establish Christianity in Æthelberht's kingdom.

105 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, I. 12. The Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon appears in 2 Kings 10.

106 *Historiae*, IV. 20.

107 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 2, lines 21–26; see also VI. 6.

108 *Vita S. Balthildis*, 18, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. II (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), pp. 475–508

109 This is indicated by the contents of a diptych listed under the title *Ex diptychis ejusdem monasterii* (following the *Regula ad Monachos* by Aurelian of Arles) in *PL* 68, col. 397. Ultrogotha is the only woman to appear on the list.

110 Council of Orléans V (549), preface and canon 15.

111 See Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', pp. 380–84.

Ultrogotha may have presented Gregory with relatively few problems, but the legacy of Queen Chlothild threw rather more obstacles in his way. Neither could Gregory simply ignore these problems, since the key events in Chlothild's life had already acquired a legendary character by his day. As the wife of Clovis I, the great patriarch of the Merovingian ruling house, and as the mother and grandmother of the next two generations of Merovingian kings, Chlothild was remembered for her political significance both before and after her husband's death in 511.[112] As we shall see, Chlothild pursued some actions in support of her or her children's political ambitions that deeply troubled Gregory. Indeed, if she had only been remembered for her political involvement, she might well have entered the *Histories* as a villainess. But Chlothild had also earned a reputation for piety, especially within Tours, where she had spent most of her widowhood (thirty-three years, until her death in 544) performing great acts of charity. Gregory was therefore obliged to accommodate this saintly image of the queen in his works, especially considering her local importance. He resolved the tension by carefully structuring his narrative of her widowhood, placing her political activity first, followed by his description of the many years she spent doing good deeds. Between these two phases, Gregory inserted a watershed moment that caused Chlothild to realise she was acting sinfully and abandon her interest in secular affairs. In this way, Gregory reconciled Chlothild's political activity and her saintly reputation, and brought her legacy into conformity with his theme on widowhood.

In the *Histories*, Gregory began his account of Chlothild's widowhood by describing a military campaign of 523 led by her sons Chlodomer, Childebert, and Chlothar against her homeland of Burgundy.[113] Gregory blamed the conflict on a longstanding grudge: Chlothild urged her sons to seek revenge upon the Burgundian royal house, and particularly the brothers Godomar and Sigismund, because many years ago their father Gundobad had executed her parents. Gregory also claimed that Gundobad was Chlothild's uncle, brother to her father Chilperic, and he condemned the campaign of 523 on the grounds that bloodshed between feuding kinsmen was a great sin. As we shall see, he was probably mistaken about these familial relations and about the causes of the campaign. Gregory's account climaxed with Chlodomer's tragic demise: he

112 Wilhelm Levison, 'Zur Geschichte des Frankenkönigs Chlodovech', repr. in *Aus rheinscher und fränkischer Frühzeit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1948), pp. 202–28 (pp. 204–09); and Margarete Weidemann, 'Zur Chronologie der Merowinger im 6. Jahrhundert', *Francia*, 10 (1982), 471–513 (pp. 481–82).

113 *Historiae*, II. 28 and III. 6. See also Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 17, where a few details are added to Gregory's account.

was killed in battle and his head impaled on a pike, much to Chlothild's shock and dismay. Gregory thought Chlodomer had brought this ill fate upon himself, since earlier in the campaign he had shown no mercy to Sigismund, ordering him and his family be killed and their bodies thrown down a well, against the admonitions of the saintly Avitus of Micy. But Gregory also held Chlothild responsible, since she had instigated the campaign, urging her sons to fight. Indeed, Gregory emphasised Chlothild's lamentations over Chlodomer's death to such an extent that they drowned out the ultimate outcome of the campaign, which was actually a Merovingian victory.[114] In his *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory went so far as to credit Sigismund with posthumous miracles, implying that his death at Chlodomer's hands was akin to martyrdom.[115]

Many aspects of Gregory's account, written fifty years after the events, are questionable. Firstly, Chlothild's parents had been put to death in the 490s, so Gregory expected his audience to believe that she had patiently waited three decades to exact revenge.[116] Yet her husband Clovis had marched against Burgundy in 500, which Gregory recounted without describing it as an act of retribution.[117] Gundobad may not even have been responsible for the murder of Chlothild's father Chilperic in the first place. Avitus of Vienne, a contemporary of the events, wrote that Gundobad wept over the death of his brothers (*germani*), which is difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to reconcile with the idea that he had murdered one of them.[118] This, of course, assumes that Gregory was right to call Chilperic and Gundobad brothers: other sources mentioned an uncle of Gundobad named Chilperic.[119] In an effort to harmonise

114 Compare Gregory's account with *Liber historiae Francorum*, 20–21, which revelled unashamedly in the glorious Merovingian victory.

115 *Gloria martyrum*, 77.

116 See Ian Wood, 'Clermont and Burgundy: 511–534', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 32 (1988), 119–25 (pp. 122–25); Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 43; and Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', p. 253. Nevertheless some have been willing to accept Gregory's claim that Chlothild's longstanding desire for vengeance was the principal motivation for the campaign, e.g. Stephen White, 'Clotild's Revenge: Politics, Kinship, and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud', in *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living*, ed. by Samuel Kline Cohn and Steven Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 107–30.

117 The date, from Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 500, has withstood scholarly criticism.

118 Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 5, in Avitus of Vienne, *Opera quae supersunt*, ed. by Rudolf Peiper, *MGH, AA*, vol. VI. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), pp. 1–102. See Justin Favrod, *Histoire politique du royaume burgonde (443–534)* (Lausanne: Bibliothèque historique Vaudoise, 1997), pp. 325–26.

119 See, for example, Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae*, V. 6. 2 and V. 7. 7.

this information with Gregory's report, it has often been assumed that there were two Burgundian kings named Chilperic, but it may simply be that Gregory was confused about the kinship relations of the ruling family of a bygone kingdom.[120] (This interpretation requires Avitus's *germani* to be a reference, not to Gundobad's brothers, but to his father and uncle, who were themselves brothers.) One way or another, Gregory misunderstood the circumstances surrounding the campaign. Perhaps he had been misled by his sources, but his emphasis on the sinfulness of intrafamilial conflict and on the lamentable involvement of a widow in secular affairs reveals his own personal concerns. Moreover, the literary parallels between his description of Chlodomer killing Sigismund and of Gundobad killing Chilperic suggest that he had reworked whatever traditions had reached him into a single, cleverly formed narrative.

Chlothild's instigation of the campaign against Burgundy was not the only awkward event of her widowhood that troubled Gregory. After Chlodomer died, Chlothild looked after his three sons, lavishing them with such affection that her own son Childebert began to worry that she might secure their inheritance of the kingdom at his expense. According to Gregory, Childebert and his brother Chlothar seized their nephews and issued Chlothild with an ultimatum: either the boys were to suffer the removal of their long hair, which signified their status as Merovingians and thus as potential heirs to the throne, or they were to be put to death. 'If they cannot gain the kingdom', Chlothild replied, 'then I would rather see them slain than shorn' (*si ad regnum non ereguntur, mortuos eos videre quam tonsus*).[121] And so they were killed (except for one of the boys, Chlodoald, who escaped, as discussed further below). Gregory clearly regarded Chlothild's choice with disgust, and he felt the need to provide some sort of explanation, writing that she had acted in the blindness of grief (*ignorans in ipso dolore*): devastated by the death of her son Chlodomer, she

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120 See Danuta Shanzer, 'Marriage and Kinship Relations among the Burgundians' (forthcoming). I would like to thank Professor Shanzer for kindly allowing me to consult a draft of this article.

121 *Historiae*, III. 18 (see also III. 6). On Childebert's threat as meaning, specifically, the loss of royal power, rather than forced monastic confinement or even scalping (as has otherwise been argued), see Max Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Corrandini, Max Dieseberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 173–212 (pp. 190–91). The distinctive long hair of the Merovingian kings was one of many symbols of legitimacy used by the royal family to maintain its position atop Gallic society. On this, see also Erik Goosmann, 'The Long-Haired Kings of the Franks: "Like so Many Samsons?"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 20 (2012), 233–59; and Averil Cameron, 'How Did the Merovingian Kings Wear their Hair?', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 43 (1965), pp. 1203–16.

had only found comfort in the thought that his sons might one day reign in his place, so she could not bear to see them humiliated and excluded from political power. Gregory, however, offered this only as an explanation, not an excuse, as it was Chlothild who had sent Chlodomer on his ill-fated revenge mission in the first place. Indeed, Gregory had no interest in excusing Chlothild's decision, because he wished instead to present it as a moment of realisation—a low point after which she came to her senses and abandoned all worldly concern, spending the rest of her life in pious good works. Occurring in 524, this watershed moment left her with two decades of life to seek and receive God's absolution.

Gregory described this rededicated Chlothild as a pious widow who generously gave alms, kept vigils, observed chastity, and donated estates to the church. Indeed, such was her devotion that she came to be regarded 'not as a queen, but as God's very own slave' (*non regina, sed propria Dei ancilla*).[122] Gregory then built on this juxtaposition of queen and slave:

> She was not led to destruction by the kingdom of her sons (*regnum filiorum*), nor by worldly ambition (*ambitio saeculi*), nor by her temporal means (*facultas*); instead she was elevated to grace through her humility.

In this way, Gregory drew parallels between Chlothild and her grandson Chlodoald, who, as mentioned above, escaped from the execution she had favoured and then used his second chance at life to renounce his claims to an earthly kingdom (*postpositum regnum terrenum*), devoting himself instead to the heavenly kingdom, becoming a priest and eventually a saint.[123] Gregory also gave an example of Chlothild's own new approach at work: when war broke out between her sons Childebert and Chlothar, she turned to the power of St Martin, keeping vigils at his tomb. As a result, on the eve of battle a sudden tempest unleashed a barrage of hail upon the opposing military camps, sending the forces into disarray and ending the conflict without bloodshed.[124] Gregory made the causal connection explicit: 'Let no man be in doubt that this occurred by the power of St Martin working through the intercession of the queen'. The new Chlothild drew upon heavenly resources, rather than her earthly means, to end, rather than instigate, conflict between kinsmen. Gregory consistently praised Chlothild up to her death, writing that she had

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122 *Historiae*, III. 18.
123 *Historiae*, III. 10.
124 *Historiae*, III. 28.

passed away in Tours 'full of days and good deeds', and that her remains were transferred with due liturgical ceremony to the church of the Holy Apostles in Paris—an event that calls to mind the translation of a saint's relics—where she was buried next to her husband, her children, and St Geneviève, whose cult she had promoted.[125] Henceforth, Chlothild only appeared in the *Histories* in passing references as a former benefactor of the church.[126]

Gregory's segregation of Chlothild's political involvement from her pious deeds was more a product of his literary strategies than historical circumstances. It seems unlikely that all the details of her life fit so neatly into one side or the other of a sudden shift in behaviour in 524. Though there is relatively little evidence to bring to bear on the matter, it can at least be said that Chlothild was involved in the appointment of three bishops of Tours spanning both sides of Gregory's chronological divide—an act that blurred the boundaries between political interference and concern for upholding pastoral care.[127] In addition, Gregory noted early in his narrative that Chlothild had begun to live permanently in Tours upon her husband's death in 511, 'except for the rare visit to Paris', and that she resided in Tours 'with the highest purity and benevolence'.[128] Presumably, Chlothild began to cultivate her reputation for piety in Tours starting from 511, not from the watershed moment of 524, though Gregory had nothing specific to say about these early years as a widow in Tours. Indeed, Gregory's statement that Chlothild made rare visits to Paris may itself be an attempt to untangle her good deeds from the bad, making the point that her unsavoury acts took place in Paris, a political centre, far away from her holy life in Tours. Therefore, while there is no clear evidence to contradict Gregory's claim that Chlothild experienced a dramatic change of heart in 524, the very fact that his narrative features such complex literary devices suggests that the events of her life did not conform so easily to his thematic concerns.

Chlothild's legacy, of course, only presented Gregory with an challenge because he saw a tension between her worldly and otherworldly pursuits.

125 *Historiae*, IV. 1. On Chlothild and Geneviève, see Martin Heinzelmann and Joseph-Claude Poulin, *Les vies anciennes de sainte Geneviève de Paris: Études critiques, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des hautes études, IVe section* (Paris: Champion, 1986), p. 53. Chlothild may have played a role in the construction of this church in Paris, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 206–08.

126 See *Historiae*, IV. 12 and X. 31; also *Virtutes sancti Martini*, I. 7.

127 *Historiae*, X. 31 (with III. 2 and III. 17). The tenures for these three bishops (Theodorus, Proculus, and Dinifius) are difficult to date because Gregory provided conflicting information, but it seems certain that they spanned both sides of 524; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit*, vol. I, p. 201.

128 *Historiae*, II. 43.

Gregory was a career ecclesiastic. He came from a family with deep ties to the episcopate. And he regarded most of the political obligations that came with his post in Tours as a regrettable, if necessary, burden. Gregory was quick to complain, for example, when campaigning armies sapped Tours of its supplies, and he described the political fugitives who sought sanctuary in St Martin's church as nuisances. Opinions were likely very different within the highest circles of the secular elite, where Chlothild's political involvement might well have been remembered as a series of virtuous deeds to be ranked alongside her appointment of bishops, her devotion to the saints, and her patronage of the church. Given that the Merovingians had annexed Burgundy in 534, there was political value in remembering Chlothild as the one who inflicted vengeance upon the house of Gundobad, especially since she was originally from the Burgundian royal family herself. For anyone familiar with this story of retribution, Chlothild's legacy was that of a Merovingian queen, not a Burgundian princess.[129] Even her conditional agreement to the execution of her grandchildren, 'if they cannot gain the kingdom', may have been regarded positively in some circles. Beginning in 561, all the rulers of Gaul were grandsons of Chlothild and Clovis, and they were likely to appreciate the queen's uncompromising approach to the birthright of her grandchildren. Here one has the chance to glimpse a culture that preferred death over dishonour as a royal virtue.[130] Gregory himself had little regard for this attitude, but he was unable to expunge the unpleasant details from his account of the queen since, like her great acts of piety, they were simply too well known. Thus, Gregory opted for a difference course: he used his literary skills to manipulate his information in order to present an account of Chlothild's life that conformed to his broader theme on widowhood while taking into consideration the expectations and common knowledge of his audience.

Conclusion

Gregory entwined the details of Chlothild's life so intricately with his theme on widowhood that one cannot simply follow the approach of Georg Scheibelreiter, who attempted to tear out Gregory's lines of praise and leave

129 See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 43.

130 Violence, honour, and gender are discussed further in Chapter 7, pp. 158–59.

behind only the historical Chlothild and her *mentalité barbare*.[131] Instead, historical analyses of the queen, and the other widows Gregory mentioned, must first identify and understand the complex literary themes and strategies at work in his writings. Gregory hoped his accounts of widows might inspire his audience to act virtuously and to adopt his own understanding of widowhood as a moral test. At the same time, Gregory drew upon common beliefs and referenced moral standards that were, at least to some extent, already agreed within society. For example, he composed his accounts with distinct biblical overtones, and on two occasions he sang the virtues of the poor widow and her two mites mentioned in the Gospels.[132] According to a later tradition, this biblical story was depicted in a mural above the west entrance of St Martin's church in Tours, along with an inscription urging the believer to steadfastly perform good deeds with a pious intention.[133] This tradition may describe conditions dating to Gregory's tenure as bishop or before. It is even possible that this mural was among those Gregory had touched up, which were originally commissioned by his predecessor after a fire in 559.[134] In a similar way, one can regard Gregory's presentation of widows as an effort to 'touch up' the convictions of his audience, adding definition to the diverse and sometimes contradictory views on morality within Gallic society by highlighting those beliefs he agreed with and brushing over alternative views. Gregory's keen interest in the subject of widowhood, perhaps surprising at first glance, must be viewed in light of the profound influence his mother had upon him. Even Gregory's use of biblical material cannot be analysed without considering Armentaria, as she herself surely drew inspiration from the same scriptural models that were later valued by her son. Little surprise, then, that Gregory upheld his mother as a paragon of holiness, or that he allowed his information on the other widows in his works, including queens, to be shaped by her example.

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131 Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Clovis, le païen, Clotilde, la pieuse: A propos de la mentalité barbare', in *Clovis: histoire et mémoire*, ed. by Michel Rouche, 2 vols (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1997), vol. I, pp. 349–67.

132 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, I. 31; and *Gloria martyrum*, 96. See Mark 12:41–44 and Luke 21:1–4.

133 This tradition is found in a collection of texts, now known as the *Martinellus*, that circulated as an appendix to some manuscripts of the works of Sulpicius Severus; see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 308–10.

134 *Historiae*, X. 31. See Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 130–32; and Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, pp. 381–90. This assumes that Gregory consistently used the word *ecclesia* to refer to the cathedral at Tours, reserving the word *basilica* for St Martin's church.

CHAPTER 2

Holiness, Femininity, and Authority

Introduction

The gates of heaven opened to men and women alike, but the path leading to them might not be the same for all. The practices of asceticism were strenuous, Gregory thought, akin to the physical hardships of battle, and as such they required virtues he associated with masculinity, like courage and fortitude in the face of overwhelming odds. Yet for Gregory, the relationship between gender and sanctity was complex. As he stressed regarding the saintly Monegund, some women exhibited these virtues nevertheless, 'sweating in these battles and winning the field'. Equally complex was the relationship between chastity and sanctity. As a bishop, Gregory was expected to observe sexual abstinence, and he mentioned many saints who did the same, but he also praised certain sexually active people for their piety, and he was even willing to describe them as 'chaste' so long as they kept their activities within express boundaries. Gregory's views, therefore, cannot be straightjacketed into a predetermined framework that has been used for understanding gender and social relations in other sources. For all his nuance, however, on one matter Gregory was uncomplicated: women were expected to submit to the authority of the (exclusively male) episcopate, regardless of their own level of saintliness. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this maxim created some difficulties for him, such as when he narrated the clash between the pious Radegund and her local bishop, Maroveus. For Gregory, gender, sanctity, and the social order fitted together, sometimes awkwardly, to create the framework in which he displayed his portraits of the women of his day.

Monegund: Exemplar and Holy Woman

In the penultimate section of his *Life of the Fathers*, which included twenty chapters, each dedicated to a particular saint, Gregory recounted the life of Monegund, a high-status woman from the city of Chartres who, after marriage and children, became an anchorite on her husbands estates before departing to live as a nun in Tours. Because the nineteen other saints who featured in the work were all male, Gregory devoted his attention to the issue of female

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sanctity in the chapter's preface. Quoted in full below, this represents a rare instance in which Gregory discussed the matter expressly:[1]

> The manifest gifts of divine favour, which descend upon mankind from heaven, cannot be comprehended through the senses, through speech, or through writing, because the Saviour of the World himself, from the formless origins of this universe, was revealed to the patriarchs, announced to the prophets, and then finally deigned to appear in the womb of Mary ever virgin. The almighty and immortal Creator took on the covering of mortal flesh and died for the redemption of men, who were dead through sin, then rose again victorious. We were gravely wounded by our misdeeds—waylaid and stabbed by robbers on the road—and he, mixing oil and wine, led us to a tavern of heavenly remedy, that is to say the teachings of the holy church.
>
> He encourages us to defend ourselves with his continuous instruction and to live by the example of the saints. He has provided us with models drawn not only from holy men, but also from those of the inferior sex who press on with virility rather than half-heartedly. He grants a share of his heavenly kingdom not only to men, who fight in a manner befitting, but also to women, sweating in these battles and winning the field. We can see this now with the blessed Monegund, who left the land of her birth and (like the prudent queen who went to hear the wisdom of Solomon) journeyed to this church of St Martin to behold his miracles which are dispensed every day, and to draw from the sacerdotal well, by which she is able to open the gates of Paradise.

The spiritual struggle consumed the same energies as physical combat, and those men who fought to attain sanctity acted in a manner 'befitting' their gender (*decertantes legitime*). Women approached these pursuits with a certain reluctance (*segniter*, 'sluggishly' or 'half-heartedly'), but Monegund adopted

1 Though not known for theological abstraction, Gregory used the prefaces of his *Life of the Fathers* to explain the spiritual significance of each particular saint's life. See Franz Brunhölzl, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, 2 vols (Munich: Fink, 1975–92), vol. 1, pp. 133–37; and John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 88–90.

characteristically male attributes, acting 'with virility' (*viriliter*), and triumphed, even though she belonged to the 'inferior sex' (*inferior sexus*).[2]

The term *viriliter*, with its etymological derivation from *vir*, 'man' (in the specifically male sense), is particularly interesting.[3] Gregory typically used the word to describe the actions of men who showed courage in battle when facing overwhelming odds.[4] He also used it more generally, to describe men resisting injustice and oppression.[5] Both of these usages followed biblical precedent.[6] On occasion, however, Gregory also used *viriliter* to describe the actions of women. For example, when Ingund refused to convert to Arianism even as Goiswinth, her mother-in-law (and maternal grandmother) beat her and forced her into the baptismal font, she resisted such abuse 'with virility' (*viriliter*).[7] Likewise, Brunhild defended a faithful official named Lupus by standing between hostile armies, facing down the threats and insults of her enemies 'with virility'.[8] In this usage, Gregory also followed biblical precedent, since Judith had acted 'with virility' when she decapitated Holofernes while he slept in his bed.[9] Thus, Gregory regarded such bravery as a characteristically

2 On this more generally, see de Giselle Nie, 'Consciousness Fecund through God: From Male Fighter to Spiritual Bride-Mother in Late Antique Female Sanctity', in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Anneke Moulder-Bakker (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 100–61.

3 On Gregory's interest in Merovingian virility, see Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours', pp. 60–62.

4 This is how Aëtius readied himself to battle Attila (*Historiae*, II. 6), how Chilperic expected his *duces* to resist the onslaught of Guntram and Childebert's combined military forces (VI. 41), how Gundovald would have been able to survive a siege if only he had dared (VII. 34), and how Grippo survived a murderous horde (X. 4).

5 This is how the bishop Brice defended himself against the charge of breaking his vow of chastity (*Historiae*, II. 1), how Injuriosus opposed Chlothar I's taxation after his fellow bishops had acquiesced (IV. 2), how Anastasius resisted the unjust seizure of his property (IV. 12), how Cato was able to stay in a plague ridden town and say Mass (IV. 31), and how Gregory himself, in a dream, resisted King Guntram's efforts to drag Eberulf from the sanctuary of St Martin's church in Tours (VII. 22). Likewise, Fredegund had once instructed her weak-willed assassins to find their nerve and act *virilitate* (VIII. 29).

6 See, for example, Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:18, 1 Chronicles 19:13, 1 Chronicles 22:13, 1 Chronicles 28:20, 2 Chronicles 32:7, 1 Maccabees 2:64, 1 Maccabees 6:31, 2 Maccabees 10:35, and 2 Maccabees 14:43. Some of these passages also carried the sense of steadfast obedience to God's law (which granted victory in battle), and this point was repeated, with a more spiritual emphasis, in Psalm 26:14 and 30:25, as well as 1 Corinthians 16:13.

7 *Historiae*, V. 38.

8 *Historiae*, VI. 4.

9 Judith 15: 11. Gregory referenced this biblical story in *Historiae*, IX. 27.

male virtue, but one that women might also display, overcoming the limitations particular to the female gender.

This calls to mind the opinion of some late antique authors who associated holiness with masculinity itself, even if Gregory never went this far. Jerome, for example, had written:

> As long as a woman is bound to childbirth and children she is as different from a man as the body is from the soul (*quam corpus ad animam*). But if she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man (*mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir*), for we all wish to progress toward the perfect man.[10]

The idea that sanctification for a woman involved transgressing the limitations of the female gender and becoming a 'virago', with the etymological meaning of 'one who is like a man' (from *vir* and the suffix *-ago*, expressing association or resemblance), stretched back to the early period of Christianity.[11] The third-century *Passion of the Holy Perpetua and Felicity*, for example, described the martyr Perpetua having a vision in which she had been 'made male' (*facta sum masculus*).[12] This interpretation, however, was not especially common in the writings produced in Late Antiquity, nor is there evidence that key texts like the *Passion of the Holy Perpetua and Felicity* circulated in Gaul or were known to Gregory himself.[13] Venantius Fortunatus referenced the pain of childbirth, breastfeeding, and sexual intercourse to encourage women to remain sexually abstinent, but even he did not push these practical points into a

10 Jerome, *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios libri tres*, III. 5, in *PL* vol. XXVI, cols 439–554 (col. 533).

11 On the virago in Late Antiquity, see Kate Cooper, 'Household and Empire: The Materfamilias as *miles Christi* in the Anonymous Handbook for Georgia', in *Household, Women, and Christianities*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 91–107; Gillian Clarke, *'This Female Man of God': Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350–450* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 214–16; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 266–71; and Kerstin Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Gotab, 1990), pp. 93–139.

12 *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, 10. On the translation as 'made male', see Rachel Moriarty, 'Playing the Man: The Courage of Christian Martyrs: Translated and Transposed', in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. by R.N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Boydell, 1989), pp. 1–11 (p. 9).

13 See Jonathan Conant, 'Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350–900: An Essay in Mediterranean Communities', *Speculum*, 85 (2010), 1–46 (pp. 21–23).

theoretical interpretation of gender that associated femininity with worldliness itself.[14] Gregory's description of Monegund fighting 'with virility' rather than 'sluggishness', therefore, fell short of associating sanctification with the suppression of femininity.

Gregory also used female imagery to enhance his depiction of Monegund's saintly life. Thus he mentioned not only the Virgin Mary, who carried the Saviour of the World in her womb, but also the Queen of Sheba, the 'prudent woman' who sought the wisdom of Solomon. Gregory also referenced the teachings of the 'holy church' (*sancta ecclesia*), which was feminine in its grammatical gender; though grammatical convention makes for a thin argument, elsewhere Gregory expressly compared the 'mother church' (*mater ecclesia*) to Noah's Ark, protecting the righteous from calamity.[15] Perhaps Gregory simply mentioned the Queen of Sheba to associate her journey to Jerusalem with Monegund's pilgrimage to Tours, or perhaps he referenced the Virgin Mary simply because he thought she belonged in any opening creed.[16] But deeper layers of meaning tempt the more speculative reader. The gospels, for example, declared that the Queen of Sheba was due to rise on the Day of Judgement and pass condemnation on a sinful generation.[17] It is possible, therefore, that Gregory wished to use female images to provide a framework for salvation—with the Virgin Mary representing the Incarnation, destined before all creation, the holy church representing the struggle to achieve holiness in the course of time, and the Queen of Sheba representing the Eschaton, when God's plan for salvation was to be fulfilled on the Last Day. Such speculation aside, Gregory clearly sought to enhance his masculine imagery of combat and virility with female examples drawn from the bible. Even the manner in which Monegund overcame the limitations of her 'inferior sex' remained, in a sense, distinctly feminine—something the male saints of the *Life of the Fathers*, by definition, never accomplished.[18]

Gregory carried this point into his account of Monegund's life by highlighting certain challenges that she faced as a woman, even as he employed the same basic narrative structure that he used in his other chapters on male

14 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VIII. 3.

15 *Historiae*, I. 4.

16 On Mary in the Early Middle Ages, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2009), pp. 100–20.

17 Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31; cf. 1 Kings 10. Gregory also compared the Queen of Sheba's journey to Solomon with Queen Ultrogotha's journey to the shrine of St Martin in Tours (*Virtutes sancti Martini*, I. 12).

18 For a similar point, see Elm, *Virgins of God*, p. 269.

saints: a conversion from secular life, a series of tests of faith (internal and external), and a demonstration of miracles before and after death, interrupted by a deathbed scene and burial.[19] For example, Monegund abandoned her worldly life of marriage and procreation after her two daughters fell ill and died. Inspired by 'maternal grief' (*genetrix maesta*), Monegund obviously had a motivation unique among the other, male protagonists of the *Life of the Fathers*.[20] Gregory's sympathetic portrayal of maternal grief also contrasts hagiographic convention, in which it was common to admonish mothers for excessive displays of grief at the loss of a child.[21] Furthermore, Gregory characterised Monegund as content with her married life. She even thanked God for blessing her with fertility, unlike the women often found in hagiographic works who were forced to take a husband even though they wanted to remain sexually abstinent and serve God alone.[22] Another unusual aspect of Gregory's account concerns the attempt of Monegund's husband to retrieve her after she left his household and journeyed to Tours, where she intended to live as a nun. Although it was not uncommon for hagiographies of women to feature a spurned husband trying to reclaim a lost sexual partner, Monegund's husband had no desire to return her to the marriage bed. Instead, he wished to put her back into her hermitage on his estates, so that he could keep her spiritual power nearby. Indeed, Monegund had only decided to leave the hermitage in the first place because her growing saintly reputation had attracted too many locals, threatening her with the sin of pride.[23] In this way, Gregory highlighted certain uniquely female challenges that Monegund faced as a wife and mother, but he did not press these examples into the service of an argument that femininity and sanctity were incompatible.

This point is further illustrated by Gregory's treatment of the Virgin Mary. Gregory specifically addressed the issue of Mary's femininity in his account of events that purportedly occurred at the Council of Mâcon. The assembled bishops admonished one of their colleagues for asking whether or not the Latin word *homo* included females in its meaning.[24] (Common usage of *homo*, like

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19 On this point, see also Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, pp. 102–14.

20 *Vita patrum*, XIX. 1.

21 See Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 34–46.

22 See, for example, Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 1–8, ed. by Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Life of Melania, the Younger: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Mellen, 1984).

23 *Vita patrum*, XIX. 2.

24 *Historiae*, VIII. 20.

the English 'man', applied specifically to males but also to humans generally.) Scholarship has further read into Gregory's account the possibility that the bishops were discussing a deeper issue, beyond mere lexical meaning: whether or not women had souls.[25] This analysis is indebted to the anti-Catholic polemics of the Protestant Reformation, but, allowing for some modification, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the bishops debated the relationship between gender and the soul: were there two types of soul, male and female, or were all souls inherently masculine? According to Gregory, the bishops explained to their colleague that Jesus was referred to as the 'Son of Man' (*filius hominis*) in the gospels, even though he had no human father. Thus, Jesus was 'the son of a virgin, that is to say, a woman' (*filius virginis, id est muleris*)—the only *homo* to which *filius hominis* referred was the woman Mary. The bishops further supported their position by reference to Genesis 5:2: '[God] created them male and female' (*masculum et feminam creavit eos*). Such an argument derived its authority from Mary's unquestioned holiness, and it assumed that she achieved this holiness without suppressing her femininity in the process.[26]

Gregory seems to have gone out of his way to make his point, since this debate is completely absent from the extant records of the council's proceedings. Either Gregory invented his account for his own purposes, or he chose to remember something that was not deemed worthy of preservation by others. It is especially interesting, therefore, that Gregory did not record the bishops discussing Genesis 2:22–23, in which God created woman (*mulier*) and brought her to Adam, who called her *virago*, 'because she was made from man' (*quoniam de viro sumpta est*). The view of Adam as the prototype of humanity, prior to woman, also featured in the Pauline epistles of the New Testament, where it served as the theological basis for describing Jesus as the 'new' or 'final' Adam, the *novissimus Adam* of 1 Corinthians 15:45 and the *vir perfectus* or 'perfect man' of Ephesians 4:13, alluded to by Jerome in his statement on the virago quoted above. Gregory, it seems, wished to avoid equally any idea that masculinity was fundamental to sanctification, that the soul was inherently

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25 See Albert Demyttenaere, 'The Cleric, Women and the Stain: Some Beliefs and Ritual Practices Concerning Women in the Early Middle Ages', in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, ed. by Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 141–65 (pp. 141–46); and Giselle de Nie, 'Is a Woman a Human Being? Precept, Prejudice and Practice in Sixth-Century Gaul', repr. in Giselle de Nie, *Word, Image, and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), article I, pp. 1–26.

26 Gregory also mentioned the Virgin Mary in *Historiae*, I. preface; I. 22; and *Gloria martyrum*, 8. He explained away the inconvenient reference to Jesus's brothers in the gospels: they were half-brothers, sons of Joseph from another wife.

masculine, or that the word *homo* meant 'males' exclusively or primarily. Gregory may have thought that the spiritual struggle of the believer involved fighting against overwhelming odds and that this was the usual domain of men, but he did not take this to mean that women were unable to achieve sanctification on their own terms, as his reference to the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Sheba, and ultimately his account of Monegund itself demonstrates.

Femininity, Sanctity, and Chastity

Monegund may have differed from the other, male saints in Gregory's *Life of the Fathers*, but she had one thing in common with them: her commitment to purely spiritual pursuits involved complete sexual abstinence. During her life she may have experienced intercourse and childbirth, but these predated her religious calling—'turning her back on the world, and rejecting the companionship of her husband, she devoted herself to God alone, placing her trust in him.'[27] Thus, Monegund's commitment to sexual abstinence meant that, in practice at least, certain defining aspects of her femininity no longer applied. This calls to mind an approach that scholars have used to understand the writings of other Christian intellectuals, who it seems treated the sexually abstinent as a case apart—a 'third gender', neither male not female.[28] Indeed, this approach was applied to Gregory's writings by Jo Ann McNamara, who suggested that Gregory employed a tripartite gender system, treating sexually active men and women as evildoers and the 'chaste', which she used as a synonym for 'sexually abstinent', as a third gender.[29] As we shall see, Gregory's view was not so simplistic. Not only did he see the topics of sexual activity,

27 *Vita patrum*, XIX. 1.

28 On the 'third gender' as analysed by scholarship, see the contributions by Lisa M. Bitel (pp. 1–15) and Jacqueline Murray (pp. 34–51) in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, eds, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Gilbert Herdt, 'Introduction: Third Sex and Third Gender', in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. by Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), pp. 21–81; Nancy Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. by Nancy Partner (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1993), pp. 117–41; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 170–72; and Averil Cameron, 'Neither Male nor Female', *Greece and Rome*, 27 (1980), 60–67.

29 Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 199–210.

gender, and holiness as related in complex ways, but his definition of 'chastity' itself was also rather more nuanced. Gregory regarded sexual abstinence as virtuous, a mark piety characteristic of many saints, but this did not lead him to disassociate masculinity or femininity from holiness, nor to categorise those who were sexually active as beyond sanctification.

Of course, Gregory upheld sexual abstinence as praiseworthy behaviour, even in marriage. In one famous example, Gregory recounted the story of a young man who agreed to his bride's request, on the night of their wedding, never to consummate their marriage.[30] Yet Gregory also praised other individuals who were sexually active in marriage for their piety. In his *Life of the Fathers*, for example, Gregory lauded his saintly namesake, Gregory of Langres, who 'is reported to have slept with his wife only for the sake of having children', and who never felt sexual attraction to 'other women'.[31] Moreover, though Gregory of Langres became bishop after a long career serving as the *comes* of Autun, our Gregory did not present this transition from secular to ecclesiastical administration as a watershed moment involving a rejection of the world in favour of total devotion to God. Indeed, since our Gregory was a direct lineal descendant of Gregory of Langres, it is safe to assume that he was glad his ancestor had been both pious and sexually active,[32] and there was certainly biblical precedent for such a view.[33] Thus, McNamara was simply wrong when she asserted that, although Gregory of Tours knew of 'sober conjugal pairs united in fulfilling the divine plan through procreation, none of them show up in his literary works'.[34]

McNamara's hypothesis that Gregory used a tripartite gender system depended on her claim that sexually active men and women appeared in his works as 'violent and murderous, their utter self-indulgence most dramatically depicted by sexual incontinence', while the sexually abstinent 'shared the classical virtue of self-control and the Christian virtue of self-abnegation'.[35] Thus, she added: 'The distinction between the sexually active and the sexually abstinent [...] forms an implicit complement to [Gregory's] division of the world

30 *Historiae*, I. 47; *Gloria confessorum*, 31.

31 *Vita patrum*, VII. 1.

32 On the importance of Gregory of Langres for Gregory of Tours and his family, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 17–18.

33 Examples in which God rewarded righteous spouses with children include 1 Samuel 1:11–28 (Elkanah and Hannah) and its parallels with Luke 1:5–25 (Zechariah and Elizabeth), as well as Genesis 21:1–2 (Sarah and Abraham), Genesis 29:31 (Leah), Genesis 30:22 (Rachel), and Judges 13:2–24 (Manoah's wife), among others.

34 McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender', p. 201.

35 McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender', pp. 200–01 and 204.

between the wicked and the righteous.'[36] On the contrary, Gregory's understanding of the relationship between sexual activity and righteousness was not so simplistic: not only was he willing to describe some sexually active people as righteous (as we have just seen), but he also refused to assume that sexual abstinence necessarily made one holy. For example, in an episode that will be of interest in Chapter 3 and below, Gregory recounted how two chaste nuns from the convent of Holy Cross in Poitiers named Chlothild and Basina led a revolt against their abbess, Leubovera, which ultimately resulted in the desecration of the monastery and the abuse of Gregory's own niece, who was a nun in the institution.[37] McNamara thought that the rebellious nuns became more violent after they abandoned their vows. This might have been true for Chlothild and Basina's forty cohorts, since many of them married 'evil men' after leaving the convent, but Gregory never questioned the sexual abstinence of the two ringleaders, whose plan was to unseat their abbess so that they could oversee the convent in her place.[38] Earlier in his *Histories*, Gregory had even noted that Basina refused her father's offer to marry her into the Visigothic royal family, because she had taken religious vows.[39] Indeed, after the failed revolt, Basina reconciled with Leubovera and returned to Holy Cross as a practicing nun.[40] Chlothild refused this option and was instead given a villa near Poitiers where she retired, presumably to a secular life, though Gregory's wording leaves open the possibility that she carried on as an avowed religious.

Especially problematic is McNamara's notion that, in Gregory's view, the sexually abstinent formed a 'third gender', neither male nor female. Firstly, on a theoretical level, this model is simply too crude to encompass the many ways in which Gregory used gender—here distinct from biological sex—to characterise behaviour, identity, and the manner in which people related through social customs and expectations.[41] Admittedly, Gregory usually exhibited a straightforward approach, dividing people into two genders, male and female, and correlating these (and related behaviour) directly to two distinct sexes. But, as we have seen in our discussion of Gregory's use of the term *viriliter*, this was not always the case. Secondly, on a practical level, this model simply does not fit the material—too many passages in Gregory's works conflict with

36 McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender', pp. 200–01.

37 See *Historiae*, IX. 39–43 and X. 15–17 and the discussion throughout Chapter 3.

38 McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender', p. 206.

39 *Historiae*, VI. 34.

40 *Historiae*, X. 20.

41 On this issue generally, see Joan Scott, 'Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?', *Diogenes*, 57 (2010), 7–14.

McNamara's reading. As we have seen, Gregory presented the Virgin Mary as holy, abstinent, and yet female—the proof used by the bishops at Mâcon that the Latin term *homo* necessarily included women. Her sexual abstinence had not resulted in the replacement of her feminine gender with a 'third gender'. Likewise, as we shall see, even in contexts where all involved practiced sexual abstinence, such as within the confines of Holy Cross prior to the rebellion of Chlothild and Basina, Gregory treated the issue of gender in a manner out of step with the idea that everyone involved belonged to a single gender, neither male nor female.

For example, during the trial that followed their failed revolt, Chlothild and Basina justified their decision to leave Holy Cross by accusing the abbess, Leubovera, of allowing men into the institution's secluded confines, in violation of the institution's rule. First, they told the tribunal that Leubovera had castrated a man and kept him in the convent, in imitation of the customs of the Byzantine empresses, who were known to have eunuchs in their company.[42] A physician named Reovalis defended Leubovera by explaining that he had castrated the man for medical reasons only, and that this had occurred before her tenure as abbess. Second, Chlothild and Basina said that Leubovera kept a man as her close associate 'who dressed in womanly vestments and was held to be female' (*qui indutus vestimenta muliebria pro feminia haberetur*), and they dramatically pointed out that he was in attendance in the gallery and, as usual, dressed in women's clothing. The man denied meeting with Leubovera regularly, saying that he lived forty miles from Poitiers and had never even spoken to her, then he added that he dressed as such because he was 'unable to perform manly work' (*nihil opus posse virile agere*).[43] These accusations were certainly loaded with a multiplicity of scandal: the presence of a eunuch, for example, not only called to mind the decadence of the Byzantine court, but also a potential crime, since castration was prohibited in several legal texts.[44]

42 *Historiae*, X. 15. On this example and the next to follow, see also Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', pp. 117–21; and Guy Halsall, 'Material Culture, Sex, Gender, and Transgression in Sixth-Century Gaul: Some Reflections in Light of Recent Archaeological Debate', repr. in Guy Halsall, *Cemeteries in Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992–2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 323–58.

43 McNamara only commented on this passage to suggest that perhaps the man had donned female attire in order to escape some obligation to engage in violent revenge, the 'manliest of all activities' (see McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender', pp. 202–03). There is no support for this whatsoever within Gregory's text.

44 See *Pactus legis Salicae*, XXIX. 17 (although XXV. 5 and XL. 11 list castration as a punishment for certain offences) and the *Decretus Childeberto rege*, V. 5, both ed. by Karl August Eckhardt, *MGH, Leges nationum Germanicarum*, vol. IV. 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1962),

Both accusations, however, were offered primarily to justify Chlothild and Basina's decision to take their cohort of nuns and leave the monastery, which had become polluted by the presence of men—a claim they supported with other, similar examples: Leubovera allowed workmen to wash in the convent's baths, entertained noblemen, and even allowed the celebration of a young man's *barbatoria*—a coming-of-age ritual that involved a first shave.[45]

Neither of these two examples contained an accusation of sexual misconduct: Chlothild and Basina were specifically asked by the tribunal if they wanted to charge Leubovera with a grave offence such as *adulterium* and they declined, stating that their case rested solely upon the abbess's violation of the convent's rule.[46] It should be pointed out, therefore, that Lewis Thorpe was quite wrong to translate '[...] *ipsi abbatissae famularetur assiduae*', in reference to the man who wore women's clothing, as 'his job was to sleep with the Abbess whenever she wanted'.[47] Gregory's language means simply that this man was being described as Leubovera's domestic servant. We must also clarify some confusion in scholarship that has erroneously regarded the eunuch and the man in women's clothing as the same individual.[48] On the contrary, Gregory's language clearly indicates that these were two separate accusations involving two different people.[49] In both cases the gender of the individual may not have been clear-cut: opinions on eunuchs varied (from mutilated men, to persons

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pp. 1–136 and 267–69 (respectively); and also *Lex Ribuaria*, VI. 28(27), ed. by F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, *MGH, Leges nationum Germanicarum*, vol. III. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1954).

45 On the *barbatoria*, see Yitzhak Hen, 'The Early Medieval Barbatoria', in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. by Miri Rubin (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2009), pp. 21–24; Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 138–43; and Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital', pp. 184–87.

46 *Historiae*, X. 16.

47 Lewis Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1986), p. 570.

48 For example, Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 31–46 (p. 34).

49 Leubovera was first acquitted of the charge regarding the man unable to do manly work. After Chlothild failed to get Leubovera on this charge (*igitur abbatissa de isto crimine non convincens* [...]), she then raised the issue of the abbess keeping a eunuch in her presence. Clearly, this could not be the same individual who had just been shown to live over forty miles from Poitiers. Leubovera was then acquitted a second time (*sed cum nec de hac re abbatissam potuissit culpabilis repperiri* [...]). Moreover, the second accusation was, specifically, that Leubovera had made men eunuchs and kept them in her presence *imperiali ordine*. It would have made little sense to accuse the abbess of mimicking imperial pomp if she had kept the man's identity secret.

made female, to unnaturally degendered beings), while the second individual's inability to perform 'manly work' served as justification for his female attire.[50] But Gregory consistently described the pair with the male grammatical gender, using the term *vir* and also, in regards to the eunuch, the term *puer* (in the sense of 'male servant' rather than 'boy'). Indeed, Gregory even wrote that the man dressed in female attire was 'most plainly revealed to be a man' (*vir manifestissime declaratus*) regardless of his clothing. Gregory thus emphasised the issue of men inappropriately accessing a monastic house for women, a point wholly obscured by any insistence that those involved belonged to a single 'third gender', neither male nor female.

Similarly, Gregory's understanding of 'chastity' was too nuanced to be equated merely with 'sexual abstinence'. This is clear from Gregory's discussion of Hilarius, a senator from Dijon, who was married and fathered several sons.[51] Hilarius managed his household with such 'chastity' (*castitas*) and 'purity of soul' (*puritas amini*) that no one practiced sexual misconduct (*adulterium*). Hilarius was married, sexually active, and yet exemplary in his 'powerful chastity' (*pollens castitas*). Gregory may have had in mind, in particular, the practice of sleeping with one's female slaves (discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5), implying this practice was unknown in Hilarius's household, though Gregory kept his language broad. He concluded by quoting Hebrews 13:4, 'let marriage be honourable and the marriage bed pure', which, in its immediate biblical context, envisioned sexual activity within certain boundaries rather than strict sexual abstinence. Elsewhere in his works, Gregory issued restrictions on sexual activity on Sundays and holy feasts.[52] Thus, the faithful could achieve the virtue of chastity by practicing a limited form of sexual abstinence which did not involve the complete denial of sexual activity. Gregory thought strict sexual abstinence, which he expected of monks, nuns, and

50 For contemporary opinions on eunuchs and gender, which has become a subject of considerable academic output since the latter half of the 1990s (especially in regards to Byzantine Studies), see especially Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); and Shaun Tougher, ed., *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

51 *Gloria confessorum*, 41.

52 On such Sabbath regulations, see Ian Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country', in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp. 61–76 (pp. 61–65).

bishops, was a better path to salvation,[53] but not the only path. He said as much to a woman named Berthegund, who left her husband and come to Tours in the hopes of becoming a nun because, as she put it, 'those joined in marriage will not see the kingdom of God.'[54] Gregory told her she was wrong and sent her back to her husband.[55]

Women and the Authority of Bishops

Gregory never doubted that he had the authority to send Berthegund away. Never mind that she had been invited to the convent, which had been founded by her mother Ingitrude, with a view to becoming abbess of the institution. Never mind that Ingitrude and Berthegund were relatives of King Guntram. (Indeed, the convent in question housed other members of the royal family, including King Charibert's daughter Berthefled.)[56] Gregory thought the institution fell firmly under his jurisdiction and he asserted his authority over the nuns with confidence. It seems that Berthegund saw matters differently. Three years later she returned to Tours, flagrantly disregarding Gregory's admonition, and this time she brought with her a son and several boats loaded with her husbands possessions, which she had taken while he was away. She thus set in motion a series of events that led to the jilted husband dispatching armed men to forcibly remove her from St Martin's church in Tours. Later, after Ingitrude's death, Berthegund returned and stripped the monastery of all its possessions, taking them with her back to Poitiers, much to Gregory's disgust.[57] Gregory recounted this ugly episode to demonstrate what might happen if a bishop's authority was not respected, in this case by a woman of high status. Indeed, his

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53 These individuals were, presumably, a better reflection of the life to come, in which, according to biblical teaching, 'they will neither marry nor be given in marriage'. See Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35–36; cf. Galatians 3:28. In *Historiae*, VII. 1, Gregory described a vision of the next life experienced by Salvius of Albi, who was taken 'to the highest peak in heaven' where he saw a limitless space that contained 'a multitude of indeterminate sex' (*multitudo promiscui sexus*) together with 'men in priestly and secular apparel' (*viri in veste sacerdotali ac saeculari*).

54 *Historiae*, IX. 33.

55 This was, of course, a different approach than the one Gregory condoned in his account of Monegund (and see also his discussion of Gunthedrud in *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 9). Monegund probably came to Tours before Gregory's tenure as bishop. Would he have turned her away?

56 These relations can be pieced together from *Historiae*, VII. 36; VIII. 2; and IX. 33.

57 *Historiae*, X. 12.

inability to stop this calamity in practice led him to stress his theoretical right to intervene as a bishop. Berthegund, of course, was not a woman of piety and devotion, but Gregory made it clear, throughout his writings, that he expected even the most holy of women to acquiesce to the authority of the episcopate. When the faithful came to Monegund seeking a miraculous cure, for example, she sometimes felt uncomfortable with their requests and told them to seek out the power of St Martin instead, for she had submitted herself in total obedience to the former bishop of Tours.[58]

Not all of Gregory's examples involved a living woman: some were drawn from the distant past or featured a saint in heaven communicating through visions or miracles. Yet even here Gregory generally avoided giving the impression that a bishop might be subordinate to authority of a holy woman. The virgin and martyr Eulalia, for example, worked a miracle on her annual feast day: in the middle of December, the trees in front of her tomb often produced dove-shaped blossoms under a brightened sky, but sometimes Eulalia refused to perform this wonder.[59] When this happened, the usual liturgical processions and singing of psalms were cancelled. The distinctive blossoms reappeared only after, as Gregory put it, 'the martyr is appeased by the tears of common people' (*placatur martyr a lacrimis plebi*). The people would then collect the blossoms and hand them to the local bishop, who used them to miraculously cure the ill. Although it was Eulalia who preformed the miracle, it was the bishop who permitted or cancelled her liturgical celebrations and distributed the miraculous blossoms at his discretion. One also assumes that, in practice, the bishop interpreted the extent of the December bloom and declared whether or not the miracle had occurred in the first place. Thus the power of Eulalia, no matter its unpredictability, remained under the oversight of the local bishop.

In another example, Gregory described how the veneration of two virgin saints, Maura and Britta, declined and their tombs became overgrown.[60] Despondent, the saints appeared to a local man in a vision and asked him to clear the graves. When he ignored the request, they appeared to him again, threatening him with death before the year's end if he did not do as they instructed. Thus sufficiently motivated, he removed the overgrowth and even built a small stone structure over the graves, then he headed to the local bishop, Euphronius (Gregory's predecessor and relative),[61] and asked him to consecrate the building as an oratory. Euphronius was not impressed by the humble

58 For a discussion of this, see Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 125–26.

59 *Gloria martyrum*, 90.

60 *Gloria confessorum*, 18.

61 This is discussed further in Chapter 1, p. 24 n. 37.

project and he refused, making excuses about his old age and poor health. Maura and Britta then appeared to Euphronius himself, but they spoke to the bishop in a manner very different from their earlier rebuke of the layman. Instead of threatening him with death, the saints tearfully begged Euphronius to do as they pleaded in the name of God, who was the truly offended party. Euphronius realised his mistake and made haste to the oratory, assisted by good weather that Gregory described as a miracle.[62] Maura and Britta may have expected obedience from the humble peasant but they knew that sincere supplication constituted the proper manner of address owed to a bishop, even one who was in the wrong.[63]

Gregory felt uncomfortable with a woman exercising authority over a male religious leader even if she lived 'as if she were a man amongst men' (*tamquam vir inter viros*), as evidenced in the case of Papula. As a young girl, Papula longed to enter a convent, but her parents refused to allow it, so she secretly entered a male religious institution (where they would never think to look for her), cutting her hair short and putting on the cloths of a man.[64] Gregory praised Papula as a committed ascetic and a worker of miracles. When the abbot of the monastery died, the monks elected her to the post, as they were 'unaware of her sex' (*ignorantes sexum*). Indeed, 'no one knew what she was' (*a nullo agnita quid esset*). Papula, however, refused 'with all her strength' (*illa totis viribus*). Gregory clearly thought it inappropriate for a woman to rank above the monks. And for all of this masculine imagery, Gregory still referred to

62 Canonical regulations stipulated that oratories with relics were to be supplied with a cleric, approved by the local bishop, who had the duty to chant the psalms; see Isabel Moreira, 'Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: The Question of Clerical Control', *Catholic Historical Review*, 89. 4 (2003), 621–42 (pp. 624–25, nn. 13–14). However, these canonical regulations, found in the promulgations of the Fourth Council of Orléans (canon 7) and the Burgundian council of Épaone (canon 25), may not necessarily have applied within the diocese of Tours.

63 See also the discussion in Kate Cooper, 'Only Virgins Can Give Birth to Christ?: The Virgin Mary and the Problem of Female Authority in Late Antiquity', in *Virginity Revisited: Configurations of the Unpossessed Body*, ed. by Bonnie MacLachlan and Judith Fletcher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 100–115.

64 *Gloria confessorum*, 16. Although Papula was not mentioned in any other source, stories of women entering male religious houses in disguise form a distinct genre within hagiographic texts, which has attracted the interest of scholarship. Among the many studies, see Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex*, pp. 155–66; Evelyne Patlagean, 'L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance', *Studi Medievali*, 17 (1976), 597–623; and John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif', *Viator*, 5 (1974), 1–32. On my use of the word 'disguise' here, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 291.

Papula as a 'servant of God' using the term *ancillia*, which was specific to female servants and had no male grammatical counterpart. (There were, of course, several more flexible terms for servant available to him: *servus, famulus*, and so on.) Gregory also wrote that, three days before her death, Papula revealed her secret, so that her body (which was to be stripped naked and cleaned) was prepared for burial 'by other women' (*ab aliis mulieribus*). Here Gregory was reshaping an existing tradition, as the site of Papula's tomb, located within the diocese of Tours, had already become an destination for pilgrims. Whatever the original story, the one Gregory told preserved the authority of the abbot as the prerogative of a man.

In another example, of uncertain historicity, Gregory described a council of bishops which gathered in Clermont during the first quarter of the fifth century to choose an episcopal successor for the diocese. The bishops failed to agree, divided into factions, and became deadlocked, until their deliberations were interrupted by a woman who entered the room and 'audaciously' (*audenter*) declared that none of the candidates under consideration was pleasing in the eyes of God.[65] This woman, unnamed but apparently an avowed religious (*mulier quaedam velata atque devota Deo*), then declared that God himself would chose the proper successor, at which point a priest named Rusticus happened to enter. The woman then confirmed she had seen Rusticus in a vision, and so he was promptly acclaimed successor by the people and elected to the post. Clearly, this woman played a key role in these events, but Gregory identified the supreme agent as God himself, and he described the bishops who listened to the instructions of the holy woman as astutely aware that God's omnipotence might be manifest in unexpected ways. Thus, in Gregory's telling this story became a lesson demonstrating that God intervenes to ensure that his episcopate continues to function properly. And, regardless of the dramatic visions and declarations of the holy woman, it was still the consensus of the bishops to accept Rusticus that made him their colleague. Safely removed from these events by a century and a half, Gregory had no fear of this woman interrupting any council that he might be attending.

Conclusion

By upholding the authority of the episcopate, Gregory provided a framework in which holiness and the ability to work miracles, available to men and women alike, became contextualised within the social order of sixth-century

65 *Historiae*, II. 13.

Gaul. Gregory did not claim that bishops were without fault. Final authority remained with God. But thankfully, God had promised to intervene and set the episcopate right when necessary. This divine guarantee reinforced the authority of the bishops in society to act as shepherds to the flock. It seems Gregory only felt comfortable with bishops obeying the instructions of holy women in the context of the family, writing, for example, that he had learned much from his mother Armentaria, and that his maternal granduncle, Nicetius of Lyons, had submitted himself to his mother as if he were one of her servants.[66] Even when discussing women who lived in the distant past, or who were saints in heaven, Gregory remained cautious. He praised those who rejected worldly affairs, such as the holy Monegund, who turned away from married life and pursued devotion to God without distraction. And he reserved his greatest praise for those who even renounced sexual activity and procreation. It may be little surprise to find Gregory the bishop lauding sexual abstinence, eager as he was to check the power of secular rulers and to link the authority of the episcopate to God's omnipotence. But Gregory also belonged to an influential, high-status family, and his flock included many married laypersons. With this in mind he also upheld as examples the senator Hilarius and his own ancestor, Gregory of Langres, who were sexually active but who kept their behaviour within certain boundaries and who governed their households with a pure soul. Gregory's interpretation only became strained in instances where a woman of unquestioned holiness clashed with a bishop and refused even the appearance of subordination, which occurred, as we shall see in the following chapter, with Radegund and her local bishop, Maroveus.

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66 *Vita patrum*, VIII. 2 (on Nicetius). Gregory's close relationship with his mother is discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 17–25.

CHAPTER 3

Scandal in Poitiers

Introduction

On the first of March, 589, a group of nuns broke the strictures of their monastic rule and left the convent of Holy Cross in Poitiers. Led by Chlothild and Basina, who boasted they were daughters of two former kings,[1] the nuns journeyed by foot across the sixty miles of muddy roads that led to Tours. They brought with them little more than their grievances against their abbess, Leubovera, and a determination to be heard by the royal court. Assailed by heavy rain and betrayed by their lack of supplies, the nuns arrived in a desperate state. Uninvited they were, but not unwelcome: Gregory offered to host them in Tours throughout the summer so that, in fairer weather, Chlothild could take her complaints to her uncle, King Guntram. Though Poitiers fell outside his jurisdiction, Gregory had a longstanding relationship with Holy Cross, and his own niece, Justina, was prioress (*praeposita*) of the institution. Yet Gregory soon came to regret his involvement with the wayward nuns, slight though it may have been. Straightaway, several of them took husbands in Tours, and, although Guntram agreed to convene a council to address their grievances, Chlothild and her nuns grew impatient and returned to Poitiers, where they 'prepared for war'. Assembling a band of 'thieves, killers, libertines, and every sort of criminal',[2] Chlothild enforced her claims through an increasingly aggressive approach that, as detailed below, resulted in the sacking of the convent and the desecration of its prized relics. Justina, who had stayed loyal to her abbess, also suffered injuries in the mayhem, which only ended when—by order of the king and with the blessing of Gregory and his fellow bishops—the local *comes*, Macco, put the revolt down by force, a full year after it had started. With order restored, an angry and perhaps slightly embarrassed

1 Gregory's words in *Historiae*, IX. 39 have been taken to imply doubt regarding Chlothild's royal pedigree. See Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions', p. 4; and Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', p. 158. I am not sure Gregory meant to imply this by writing '[*Chrodechildis*], *qui se Chariberthi quondam regis filiam adserebat*', which I have translated below as 'she kept boasting that her father was King Charibert'. As we shall see, regardless of Gregory's opinions, the events themselves strongly suggest that she was regarded as a member of the royal family.

2 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

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Gregory joined his colleagues in the cathedral in Poitiers to pass judgement upon Chlothild and Basina. Condemnation also came in the *Histories*, where Gregory devoted several chapters to this local affair.[3] Never a more dutiful historian than here, Gregory cited official documents in full and supplied both context and background, though he may have asked too much of his material. In a mood to name and shame, and needing to justify his own actions, Gregory marshalled an interpretation of Holy Cross's history that included questionable details, especially those concerning the early years of the institution.

When Trouble Arrives on the Doorstep

When Chlothild and Basina decided to seek the assistance of the bishop of Tours and, ultimately, the royal court in pursuit of their grievances, they went over the head of their local bishop, Maroveus, and their metropolitan, Gundegisel of Bordeaux. Clearly, their arrogance was to blame. Yet Gregory still needed to explain why he had intervened in a matter that was outside his jurisdiction and offered the nuns his support. As we shall see below, he provided precedent for his actions, but he also insisted that he had been motivated by pastoral concern.

> A great scandal arose in the convent of Poitiers when the Devil ensnared the heart of Chlothild. Relying on her royal kinship (for she kept boasting that her father was King Charibert), Chlothild extracted an oath from her fellow nuns to have their abbess, Leubovera, accused of certain crimes and expelled from the monastery, and to select none other than herself to be their new mother superior. Chlothild then departed with forty or more nuns including her cousin, Basina, who was Chilperic's daughter, saying: 'I am going to my royal kin so that they will know of our indignity, for here

3 Gregory treated the scandal in *Historiae*, IX. 39–43 and X. 15–17. See Kathrin Götsch, 'Der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers: Flächenbrand oder apokalyptisches Zeichen? Zu den merowingischen Klosterfrauen in Gregor von Tours *Zehn Büchern Geschichte*', *Concillium Medii Aevi*, 13 (2010), 1–18; Sarah Rütjes, *Der Klosterstreit in Poitiers: Untersucht anhand der hagiographischen Quellen von Gregor von Tours „Decem libri historiarum"* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2009); and Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Königstöchter im Kloster: Radegund (ob. 587) und der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers (589)', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 87 (1979), 1–37.

> we are abased. I am treated not as the daughter of a king, but as the spawn of filthy slave girls!'
>
> Chlothild, sullen and spoiled, had not the slightest hint of the humility shown by the blessed Radegund, who had founded the convent! And so she came to Tours and greeted me with the following request: 'I ask, holy bishop, that you grant these girls the protection of your custody and provide them with food—for they have been reduced to an appalling state of degradation by their abbess in Poitiers—until I return from informing my royal kin of our grievances.'
>
> 'If the abbess is at fault', I replied, 'or if she has neglected any regulations, let us go to our brother, Bishop Maroveus, and together we will set her straight. Then, with the matter settled, you can all go back to your monastery. Otherwise, what Radegund brought together through constant fasting, prayers, and almsgiving might well be torn to pieces.'
>
> 'No I think not', she answered. 'We shall go to the kings.'
>
> 'How can you oppose my plan?', I asked, 'On what grounds do you ignore this priestly instruction? If the bishops of the churches were gathered here, they would excommunicate you!'[4]

Gregory then cited a letter that had been written some years before by the bishops of the surrounding dioceses to Radegund, foundress of Holy Cross, in which they promised to excommunicate any nun who left Holy Cross (which was forbidden by the convent's rule, discussed below).[5]

Such stern words aside, Gregory had no desire to excommunicate the nuns. Instead, he offered his hospitality while Chlothild took her complaints to the royal court. As a dutiful pastor, Gregory could not send the hungry and weary nuns back across muddy roads to Poitiers with an excommunication hanging round their necks. But other bishops were not so understanding. After Chlothild had received her promise from Guntram and returned to Poitiers with her patience exhausted, she and her nuns took up residence in St Hilarius's church with their band of thieves, killers, and libertines, where they were met by Gundegisel, the aforementioned metropolitan, together with a host of clerics that included Maroveus and two other bishops from the neighbouring dioceses of Angoulême and Périgueux. Unlike Gregory, Gundegisel reached straight for the crook. When the nuns refused to return to their monastery, he

4 *Historiae*, IX. 39.

5 *Historiae*, IX. 39. These were the bishops of Tours, Rouen, Paris, Nantes, Angers, Rennes, and Le Mans. On the absence of the bishop of Poitiers from this list and its significance, see below and Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, p. 31.

pronounced the words of excommunicated upon them. Outraged, Chlothild ordered her mercenaries to attack the clerical entourage, bludgeoning them and sending them scattering in fear. One deacon became so terrified that he rode his horse into the river Clain, which skirts the old boundaries of Poitiers, without searching for a proper ford. Emboldened by her show of strength, Chlothild seized the estates and servants belonging to Holy Cross, leaving the institution without income or proper support. Greater offences were to follow, as we shall see below. By relating these details, Gregory illustrated the consequences of a heavy hand—leaving the impression that his own approach had been the more prudent. Gundegisel and his wounded clerics, however, might have wished their colleague in Tours had excommunicated Chlothild when her only associates were hungry and dishevelled nuns, rather than ruthless cutthroats.

Pity may well have inspired Gregory's gentler approach, but deference to these daughters of kings surely also lurked among his motives. Chlothild and Basina certainly expected polite obedience from the bishop of Tours and all those they considered below their royal station. Throughout their revolt, they remained convinced that the governance of Holy Cross rightly belonged to them, and they even squabbled with each other over who deserved the honour most. Neither were their feelings of entitlement without some justification. When Chlothild had arrived at Guntram's court, for example, the king had received his niece with open arms and 'honoured her with gifts'.[6] He had also promised to convoke a council to address her grievances; Chlothild only took matters into her own hands after she grew impatient with her uncle's dithering. Of course Chlothild and Basina did not always get their way, least of all with Gundegisel. But he was of considerable rank himself, having served first as the *comes* of Saintes before he became metropolitan of Bordeaux by the direct intervention of Childebert II.[7] Indeed, one might say that the ability to offend important people is a privilege all its own. And as we shall see, for all the trouble they caused, Chlothild and Basina escaped serious punishment. Though they could well have been charged with murder, sacrilege, or perhaps even treason, they were merely found guilty of violating their rule and punished with excommunications—which were soon pardoned on Guntram's orders. Basina even returned to Holy Cross, which the abbess Leubovera must have found irksome, while Chlothild received a villa outside Poitiers where she retired quietly, perhaps carrying on as an avowed religious.[8] One wonders if

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6 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

7 *Historiae*, VIII. 22.

8 *Historiae*, X. 20.

she even used the villa as a monastery, establishing a small, rival community not far from Holy Cross. Spoilt Chlothild and Basina may have been, but not without reason.

The Scandal before the Scandal: Radegund, Maroveus, and the True Cross

Gregory took comfort knowing that he was not the first bishop of Tours to become entangled in the affairs of Holy Cross and the neighbouring diocese of Poitiers. Long before Chlothild and Basina had braved the muddied roads of the Touraine, Gregory's relative and predecessor, Euphronius, had found himself obliged to provide services that the nuns might otherwise have expected from their local bishop. Indeed, Gregory was keen to connect his own involvement in 589 to this precedent, established some two decades earlier. 'It is best to recount the subject of this scandal from its beginning', he wrote, after he described how Chlothild had refused his plan to solicit Maroveus's help in resolving her complains:[9]

> In the days of Sigibert, after Maroveus became bishop of the city, the blessed Radegund was inspired by her faith and devotion to dispatch clerics to the lands of the East, equipped with letters from King Sigibert, to acquire the wood of the Lord's Crucifixion and the relics of the holy apostles and other martyrs. When the envoys returned with their quest fulfilled, the queen asked her bishop to deposit the relics in her monastery with all due honour and the chanting of psalms. But Maroveus regarded her request with contempt. Mounting his horse, he departed for his villa.[10]

This was certainly not the response that Radegund, a former queen and renowned ascetic, expected from her bishop. So she turned again to Sigibert, who instructed Euphronius to bring his clergy from Tours and install the fragment of the Cross with full liturgical ceremonies. This ended the conflict but not the animosity, which lingered into Gregory's own time as bishop of Tours. Indeed, Gregory visited the nuns in Holy Cross on more than one occasion to

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9 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

10 On Radegund's envoys to the East, and the likelihood of more than one journey, see Isabel Moreira, '*Provisatrix optima*: St. Radegund of Poitiers' Relic Petitions to the East', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19 (1993), 285–305.

provide the services Maroveus withheld. He even presided over Radegund's funeral, since Maroveus found himself conveniently detained by pastoral duties in nearby parishes.[11]

After their foundress died, the nuns of Holy Cross were left to beg Maroveus to reconcile and assume his responsibilities:

> At first Maroveus was inclined to refuse, but, on the advice of those around him, he promised to be a father to the nuns, as was right and proper, and to protect them when need arose. He therefore went to King Childebert and obtained an order placing the monastery under his regular governance, like everything else in his diocese. Nevertheless, I think something which I cannot understand lingered in his heart, and this stirred up the scandal [of 589], as the nuns claimed.[12]

Gregory thus rebuked Maroveus not only for initiating a longstanding dispute with Radegund, but also for the turmoil that erupted in Poitiers two years after her death. Given this context, Chlothild's decision to seek Gregory's help, and to insist on taking her grievance to the king rather than her local bishop, appeared quite reasonable—a predictable consequence of Maroveus's conduct. Yet the connection between the initial dispute over installing the fragment of the Cross and the subsequent scandal many years later was less clear than Gregory implied, especially since Maroveus actually reconciled with the nuns of Holy Cross after Radegund's death. Indeed, the arrangement Sigibert had established with Euphronius, informal as it was, had ended when Childebert II normalised Maroveus's relationship with the institution.

Gregory may have claimed to know the secrets of Maroveus's heart, but he offered no insights into the cause of the bishop's animosity toward Radegund and her nuns. This harsh treatment of an episcopal colleague is especially noteworthy since Gregory worked with Maroveus on other occasions and showed respect for him elsewhere in his writings.[13] Yet when it came to the

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11 *Gloria confessorum*, 104. See also Baudonivia, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 23.

12 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

13 See, for example *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 44 (Maroveus attends the feast of St Martin in Tours and witnesses a blind man from Poitiers recover his sight); *Historiae*, VII. 24 (Maroveus defends the inhabitants of Poitiers from a hostile army by using church plate to ransom their safety); and *Historiae*, IX. 30 (Maroveus requests tax assessors come to Poitiers to reduce the payments required by widows, orphans, and the infirm, though these tax collectors then travel to Tours with greedier ambitions). Gregory's archdeacon Plato eventually succeeded Maroveus in Poitiers; see Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 14.

confrontation with Radegund, Gregory left the impression that Maroveus's actions were inexplicable. Radegund's saintly character was, after all, beyond question for Gregory, and he openly admitted that he had struggled to hold back his tears as he presided over her funeral. We also know (though Gregory did not admit) that Radegund's support had been key to his appointment as bishop of Tours.[14] But if Radegund's death effectively ended the dispute between the nuns of Holy Cross and Maroveus, one must wonder if she deserves the greater share of blame. Perhaps a queen did not make an easy neighbour. Nor was piety a sure indicator of obedience; as we have seen with Chlothild and Basina, royal women—nuns included—were not always prepared to equate humility before God with submission unto their local bishop. Before building her convent in Poitiers, Radegund had known only the life of a queen: born to the Thuringian king Berthar, she had been captured by the Merovingian king Chlothar when she was very young and taken to one of his villas, where she was groomed to become his wife upon reaching majority.[15] A quarter century passed before she left her husband's side to found her convent. Radegund's hagiographers treated this separation delicately (Gregory, for example, thought the turning point had been Chlothar's assassination of her brother), but it is clear that Chlothar supported Radegund's endeavour, since her convent was built on land he donated.[16]

Radegund's regal demeanour manifested in several ways during her dispute with Maroveus. It seems, for example, that she had not bothered to clear her acquisition of relics from the East with him beforehand. Rather, she took the matter straight to Sigibert and, indeed, to the Byzantine court.[17] Moreover, the arrival of wood from the Cross of the Crucifixion and relics of the holy apostles put Maroveus in an difficult position, since they threatened to alter the landscape of spiritual authority within Poitiers. As bishop, Maroveus derived much of his clout from his association with St Hilarius, his fourth-century predecessor and renowned champion of Catholic orthodoxy.[18] Yet the cult of St Hilarius was no match for relics of Jesus and his apostles. To make matters worse, the

14 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, V. 3. This is discussed in Chapters 1, pp. 23–24 and 7, pp. 142–43.

15 *Historiae*, III. 7; Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 2.

16 See *Historiae*, III. 7; Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 12; and Baudonivia, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 4–7.

17 The relics were not Radegund's only gifts from Justin II and Sophia. She also received gospels studded with gold and gems. See Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II'; and Moreira, '*Provisatrix optima*'. For the view that Radegund played only a minor role in dispatching these embassies, see Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions'.

18 On this and what follows, see Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power', p. 153; and Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 31–36.

cult of Hilarius was centred on the saint's tomb outside the city walls, beyond the ancient amphitheatre.[19] Radegund had built Holy Cross within Poitiers, located prominently next to the cathedral and the city gates.[20] In doing so she had copied the layout of St John's convent in Arles (an example she followed in other ways, discussed below), but there the local bishop and the abbess had been brother and sister.[21] Radegund also assumed a rank that was arguably more problematic for Maroveus than that of abbess (a title which she gave to a loyal follower): she was consecrated a deaconess by Médard, bishop of Noyon, conjuring memories of the ancient order of deaconesses—which had become defunct by this time and, indeed, had never been recognised by Merovingian conciliar legislation.[22] Gregory certainly understood the challenge of dealing with powerful queens (as we shall see in Chapter 6), and he also appreciated the importance of the cult of St Hilarius for the bishops of Poitiers, especially since his own standing in Tours greatly benefited from his custodianship of the tomb of St Martin. Indeed, Gregory referenced the cult of St Hilarius in his work on *The Virtues of St Martin*,[23] and he showed sensitivity to Maroveus's predicament on a visit to Poitiers, when he went first to Hilarius's tomb before continuing to Radegund's convent and venerating the wood of the Cross.[24]

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19 Radegund's desire to locate the fragment of the Cross in a convent that practiced strict seclusion may also have contributed to her dispute with Maroveus. See Barbara Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible Cloisters: Gregory of Tours and Episcopal Exemption', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 181–98 (pp. 192–94).

20 See Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 220–29.

21 Not that Arles was without its own disputes. For a detailed study, see William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and, more recently, Lindsay Rudge, 'Dedicated Women and Dedicated Spaces: Caesarius of Arles and the Foundation of St John', in *Western Monasticism ante Litteram: The Spaces of Monastic Observance in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Hendrik W. Dey and Elizabeth Fentress (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 99–116. The similarities between the layout in Poitiers and Arles are conspicuous because few other convents in northern Gaul were built within the walls of a city; see Hartmut Atsma, 'Les monastères urbains du nord de la Gaule', *Revue d'Histoire de l'Église de France*, 62 (1976), 163–87 (pp. 182–85).

22 Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 12. On the order of deaconesses, and the related order of widows, see Clarke, *'This Female Man of God'*, pp. 82–99, 205–11; Elm, *Virgins of God*, pp. 171–76; Alexandre Faivre, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie: les premières étapes du cursus clérical* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), pp. 98–138; and Roger Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972), pp. 75–109.

23 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 44.

24 *Gloria martyrum*, 5.

Gregory implied that the problems in Poitiers had only started when Maroveus became bishop: 'In the days of King Chlothar, when the blessed Radegund founded this convent, she and her entire flock had always been submissive and obedient to the earlier bishops.'[25] But if relations were initially amicable, it was rather more likely that submission and obedience flowed in the other direction: the first bishop, Pientius, had been appointed by Chlothar, who also arranged for another loyalist, his *dux* Austrapius, to be the successor.[26] When Chlothar died, however, King Charibert removed Austrapius from contention in favour of his own choice, Pascentius, who quickly ran into trouble with Radegund and created the situation Maroveus inherited.[27] We do not know Maroveus's own background, but his name, a form of 'Merovech', suggests an association with the royal family, perhaps even the rival branch represented by Chilperic, who had a son named Merovech and who remained hostile to Sigibert, Radegund's principal supporter after her husband's death.[28] Whatever the case, Maroveus's dispute with Radegund clearly deserved a better explanation than Gregory provided, one that took into consideration the queen's conduct and, in particular, the extent to which her presence in Poitiers challenged Maroveus's ecclesiastical authority. Prestige was clearly an important asset for Radegund, not only in establishing her position in the city, but also in managing her own institution. As we have seen, her nuns were not inclined to take orders from just anyone. One might say she set a precedent only a queen could follow—and that her death (followed shortly thereafter by that of her loyal abbess) left the convent without a comparable leader. Little surprise Chlothild and Basina thought they, not Leubovera, deserved to govern the institution.

Closing the Gates of Heaven

In founding her convent, Radegund hoped to recreate the seclusion from the world and its temptations that had first been achieved by the Desert Fathers of Christian antiquity when they journeyed into the wilderness.[29] The scandal

25 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

26 *Historiae*, IV. 18.

27 Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 30–33.

28 On Maroveus's name, see Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 43. On Maroveus's hostility to Sigibert, see Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions', pp. 13–14.

29 On monastic space and the flight from worldly temptation, see E. T. Dailey, 'Introducing the Idea of Monastic Space in its Early Years, 250–750', in *Monastic Space through Time*, ed.

of 589 threatened to ruin that ambition. As Chlothild and her band of thugs closed in on the institution, seizing its estates and servants, the world and its ills crept ever closer to the gates of Holy Cross. One night, a week before Easter, Chlothild ordered a select group of henchmen to sneak into the convent itself and capture Leubovera. Guided only by a dim candle, they found the abbess prostrate before the fragment of Cross. In the ensuing melee the attackers injured several of the nuns, and one another, before grabbing Gregory's niece Justina by mistake and dragging her away. At the light of dawn they realised their error. Returning to the convent, the henchmen took the correct hostage and paraded her through the streets in disgrace before depositing her in St Hilarius's church, surrounded by armed guards. Embolden by success, Chlothild's full cohort of mercenaries returned in force and sacked the convent the following evening, lighting a bonfire to help them take everything in sight. Only now did governing officials act decisively to end the revolt: Flavianus, the *ex-domesticus* of Childebert II, rescued Leubovera from her captives, while Guntram ordered the *comes* of Poitiers, Macco, to end the whole affair by force. Meanwhile, Chlothild prepared Holy Cross for siege:

> It therefore became necessary for the *comes* to go forth with arms. Some of the evildoers he beat with cudgels, a few he ran through with spears, and those who offered determined resistance he cut down with a slash of the sword. When Chlothild saw this she took up the Lord's cross—the first moment had she showed its power any respect—and went out to meet her foes. 'You will do me no violence', she said, 'for I am a queen—daughter of one king and cousin to another. You must all stand down, lest a time come when I take my vengeance upon you.' But the footmen considered her words cheap and, as I said, they fell upon those offering resistance and took them out of the monastery in chains. Some were tied to posts and beaten severely, others were separated from their own hands, ears, noses, or scalps. Thus the rebellion was put down, and peace restored.[30]

Gregory lingered on each of Chlothild's crimes, evoking a sense of disgust and indignation by sparing none of the ghastly details. Surely many shared his sentiment, including the bishops gathered in Poitiers in the aftermath of the revolt. Unlike Gregory's *Histories*, however, the record of judgement they

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by E. T. Dailey and Stephen Werronen (Leeds: Institute for Medieval Studies, 2013 [2014]), pp. 5–25.

30 *Historiae*, X. 15.

produced focused less on the sensational events of the revolt and more on a single issue—the violation of the rule of Caesarius used in Holy Cross, and particularly its injunction that the nuns were never to leave their monastic confines. Indeed, the bishops opened with this very point: 'We asked Chlothild and Basina why they abandoned their monastic precincts and broke open the doors of the convent, in violation of their rule.'[31] Caesarius of Arles had composed his rule in the early sixth century for the nuns in St John's convent.[32] Founded by his sister Caesaria, the convent pioneered organised female religious life at a time when Gaul had few comparable institutions.[33] Even more unusual, however, was the convent's uncompromising approach to seclusion, as very few institutions shared its absolute prohibition of egress: 'If a girl leaves her parents and wishes to renounce the world and enter the sheepfold, so that by God's help she can avoid the jaws of spiritual wolves, then she must never go out of the monastery until her death.'[34]

Not only had Radegund adopted Caesarius's rule in Holy Cross, but, perhaps inspired by both the novelty and difficulty of such strict confinement, she had also solicited a formal agreement from the bishops of surrounding diocese to excommunicate any nun who left. Indeed, the nuns remained behind their walls even during Radegund's funeral, when the queen's body was taken to a nearby burial site.[35] It seems the nuns in St John's also took an uncompromising approach, even when their presence was required at the royal court, as

31 *Historiae*, X. 16.

32 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, ed. by Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, *Césaire d'Arles: Œuvres monastiques*, vol. I: *Œuvres pour les moniales* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988), pp. 170–273. For the chronology of composition, see pp. 95–98: chapters 1–47 contain material presented to Caesaria in 512 and subsequent amendments made prior to 534; chapters 48–65 and 72–73 constitute the *Recapitulatio* of 534; chapters 66–71 were probably composed before 534, when they were added as an appendix. Caesaria surely contributed to the contents of the rule in a significant way; see Lindsay Rudge, 'Texts and Contexts: Women's Dedicated Life from Caesarius to Benedict' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2006), pp. 65–71.

33 On the paucity of female religious houses in early sixth-century Gaul, see Anne-Marie Helvétius, 'L'organisation des monastères féminins à l'époque mérovingienne', in *Female 'vita religiosa' between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments, and Spatial Contexts*, ed. by Gert Melville and Anne Müller (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2011), pp. 151–69; and Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities, 500–1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline', *Signs*, 14 (1989), 261–92.

34 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, 2. On the development of strict confinement, see E. T. Dailey, 'Confinement and Exclusion in the Monasteries of Sixth-Century Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 22 (2014), 304–35.

35 Baudonivia, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 24. See also *Gloria confessorum*, 104.

evidenced in the early seventh century by the abbess Rusticula, who refused to visit Chlothar II on the grounds that her rule forbade egress.[36] (The king got his way, however, ordering the royal official Faraulfus to remove the stubborn abbess from her convent against her will.) In excommunicating Chlothild and Basina, therefore, the bishops upheld their original pledge to Radegund and supported her strict approach to seclusion. Thus their record of the judgement, with its emphasis on the rule of Caesarius, likely reflects the ethos of the convent itself and those nuns who had stayed loyal to Leubovera. Indeed, the bishops explicitly connected each of Chlothild and Basina's many crimes to the breaking of the rule, treating the chaos of their revolt as a consequence of abandoning confinement in Holy Cross in favour of the world and its temptations.

Interestingly, throughout the trial Chlothild and Basina refused to criticise their rule. They did not, for example, insist that strict confinement was impracticable, even though it was commonplace in other convents to allow nuns to leave and visit relatives or fulfil errands. Indeed, even Caesarius's successor, Aurelian, permitted egress under these conditions in his own rule for nuns.[37] Neither did they mention that all male religious houses permitted at least a limited form of egress, as even Caesarius had permitted in his rule for monks. Instead, Chlothild and Basina accused Leubovera of profaning the sacred confines of Holy Cross by allowing strange men to enter and by behaving as if she were running a aristocratic château rather than a secluded monastery, thus necessitating their flight: Leubovera had kept a eunuch in her presence (as discussed in Chapter 2), entertained noblemen, played board games, allowed men to wash in the baths, and even celebrated a young man's *barbatoria*—a coming-of-age ritual that was usually attended by relatives, including males.[38] In contrast, the rule of Caesarius only permitted entry to select outsiders: bishops, the *provisor*, a priest, deacon, subdeacon, and one or two lectors (as the liturgy necessitated), workmen and slaves (when repairs were required), and

36 *Vita Rusticulae sive Marciae abbatissae Arelatensis*, 10, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. IV (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1902), pp. 337–51 (pp. 344–45).

37 Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, 12, *PL* vol. LXVIII, cols 385–95. There are hints that even Caesarius himself had conflicting thoughts. In a letter he wrote to Caesaria he recommended that nuns be permitted to travel in public under certain circumstances, provided that they kept their conversations with men brief and infrequent. See Caesarius of Arles, *Vereor*, 2, ed. by Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, *Césaire d'Arles: Œuvres monastiques*, vol. I: *Œuvres pour les moniales* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988), pp. 294–337. The letter cannot be dated with any certainty, so it may represent an early stage in Caesarius's thought; see Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles*, pp. 127–28.

38 On the *barbatoria*, see the discussion in Chapter 2, p. 57.

close male relatives.[39] And these visitors were subject to tight regulations.[40] Thus, Chlothild and Basina claimed that Leubovera had violated the rule first, and they characterised their efforts to acquire control over Holy Cross ultimately as a project of monastic reform. Indeed, when asked by the bishops if they wished to accuse Leubovera of a capital crime such as murder, adultery, or witchcraft, Chlothild and Basina declined: their only charge was that 'she had acted contrary to the rule' (*eam ista fecisse contra regulam proclamarent*).[41] And so the spoilt princesses of Gregory's narrative became, in their own interpretation, devout women determined to use everything at their disposal, including their political connections, to restore Radegund's vision of a convent secluded from worldly temptation.

In responding to these accusations, Leubovera appealed to Radegund's precedent: the late queen had allowed slaves into the baths upon their construction as she feared the fresh mortar might be harmful to her nuns, and this subsequently became a Lenten tradition. She had permitted the eunuch to be castrated, but only for medical reasons. And she too had also indulged in board games, which were not expressly forbidden by Caesarius's rule. Unsurprisingly, the bishops accepted Leubovera's version of events and added that, whatever infractions she may have committed, they were no justification for Chlothild and Basina's decision to leave the convent. Strict confinement was absolute. Forbidding nuns egress was, it seems, more important than prohibiting men ingress. Even when Chlothild and Basina asserted that several nuns had become pregnant under Leubovera's watch, the bishops refused to hear it. More likely, they said, this had occurred 'because the gates were broken' (*quia claustra disrupta sunt*) and because the wayward nuns had been 'without the instruction of their abbess' (*sine disciplina abbatissae suae*) while away from Poitiers.

Certainly, Gregory agreed with the decision. He offered no excuses for the rebellious pair and, as we have seen, he filled his account of the scandal with every lurid detail. Yet there are hints he did not quite share his colleagues' enthusiasm for the strict confinement enjoined by Caesarius's rule. Indeed,

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39 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, 36 and 40.

40 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, 39. The men conducting the liturgy were to be of sufficient age and reputation. The workmen were to be accompanied by the *provisor* at all times. The consent of the abbess was to be sought. No meals were to be provided for visitors (not even for the bishop of Arles). And relatives were only able to meet if another nun was present.

41 *Historiae*, x. 16.

Gregory even suggested that Radegund had adopted the rule in imperfect circumstances, more out of need than zeal. After recounting the dispute between Radegund and Maroveus over the fragment of the Cross, Gregory added:

> Afterwards Radegund frequently sought—but did not receive—the goodwill of her bishop. And so she and her abbess, whom she had appointed, were forced by necessity to turn to the city of Arles. They took up the rule of the holy Caesarius and blessed Caesaria and put themselves under the protection of the king, since they were unable to find any concern or safekeeping from the man who was meant to be their pastor.[42]

Terse, dull, and rather unflattering, this description of the moment Holy Cross adopted Caesarius's rule was buried under Gregory's criticisms of Maroveus and his lamentations of the longstanding antagonism in Poitiers. Its accuracy is also suspect.[43] A letter, written to Radegund by Caesaria's successor suggests that Holy Cross had already received a copy of the Caesarius's rule prior to the arrival of the great relics from the East and the subsequent dispute with Maroveus.[44] Another letter, written by Radegund to several bishops (which Gregory included in his *Histories*), mentioned the founding of Holy Cross and the adoption of the rule in tandem, perhaps suggesting the two events occurred in close chronological proximity.[45] This evidence is not conclusive, of course, but neither does Gregory's nonchalant treatment of the matter inspire much confidence in his details.

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42 *Historiae*, IX. 40. On Holy Cross and the issue of royal protection, see Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible Cloisters', pp. 190–92; and Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 137–38. For the view that Radegund journeyed to Arles to receive the rule, see René Aigrain, 'Le voyage de Sainte Radegonde à Arles', *Bulletin philologique et historique* (1926–27), 119–27.

43 See Julia M. H. Smith, '*Radegundis peccatrix*: Authorizations of Virginity in Late Antique Gaul', in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. by Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 303–26; and Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, 'Les débuts de Sainte-Croix', in *Histoire de l'abbaye Sainte-Croix de Poitiers: quatorze siècle de vie monastique*, ed. by Edmond-René Labande (Poitiers: Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1986), pp. 25–75.

44 Caesaria II, *Epistola*, XI, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH, Epistolae*, vol. III. 7 (Berlin: Weidemann, 1892), pp. 450–53.

45 *Historiae*, IX. 42. The letter also survives, with alterations, independently; see *Diplomata*, ed. by Pardessus, vol. I, pp. 150–54.

Elsewhere in his account of the scandal, Gregory described an earlier incident in which the strict confinement of Holy Cross had been broken:

> A few years before [Chlothild's revolt], a nun jumped down from the walls and fled to the church of St Hilarius. She hurled many accusations against her abbess, but we discovered they were false. After a while she returned to the monastery, using ropes to pull herself up to the very spot from where she had thrown herself down before. She asked to be secluded in a private cell: 'I have sinned against the Lord and against my lady, Radegund' (who still lived in those days), 'so I want to be separated from the whole community and do penance for my carelessness, since I know the Lord is merciful and forgives those who confess their sins.' And she entered her cell—but when this [new] scandal occurred, after Chlothild returned from visiting Guntram, she broke open the door to her cell during the night, slipped out of the monastery, and made off to Chlothild, accusing her abbess of many crimes just as before.[46]

Clearly, Gregory did not think that strict confinement necessarily vouchsafed monastic discipline to a convent or that it offered a sure remedy for disorder.[47] Moral failings could not be contained by high walls. A very different view, which merits comparison, was expressed in a story told by the *Life of Caesarius*. When a fire broke out in St John's, the nuns in Arles took refuge in the convent's cisterns because they were not allowed to leave the monastic grounds (*quibus foris exire non licebat*). They escaped certain death only when the flames miraculously dissipated.[48] The *Life of Caesarius* clearly wished to suggest that God approved of an uncompromising approach to confinement, and that God had rewarded the nuns for their unflinching adherence to their rule. In contrast, when Gregory admitted that his niece had remained in Holy Cross only to receive a beating from Chlothild's thugs, he presented the antithesis of this view. Though Gregory respected both Caesarius and Radegund, he did not uphold strict confinement as an ideal, nor did he consider egress to be Chlothild and Basina's fundamental crime. For him, the troubles in Poitiers

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46 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

47 For Gregory's views on monastic seclusion in general, see Dailey, 'Confinement and Exclusion', pp. 323–35.

48 *Vitae Caesarii episcopi Arelatensis libri duo*, I. 26, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. III (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 433–501 (p. 494). See William E. Klingshirn, 'Caesarius's Monastery for Women in Arles and the Composition and Function of the *Vita Caesarii*', *Revue Bénédictine*, 100 (1990), 441–81.

occurred because the local bishop, Maroveus, had turned his back on the nuns. After that, 'the Devil ensnared the heart of Chlothild'—the rest was inevitable.

Conclusion

Occurring only a few years before his death, the scandal probably had little impact on the views Gregory expressed in his writings beyond Books IX–X of his *Histories*. Yet Gregory's account remains invaluable because it shows us a master craftsman reaching for his best tools. Outraged at the recent events in Poitiers, frustrated with his failure to resolve the matter quietly, and perhaps a little embarrassed at the hospitality he had initially showed to Chlothild and her wayward nuns, Gregory responded as any historian would. He produced his own skilfully narrated interpretation, supported by the appropriate background information and underpinned with copies of official documents. On close personal terms with the late Radegund, Gregory refused to entertain any suggestions that the pious queen had contributed to the problems in Poitiers. Thus, Maroveus received more than his share of blame for both scandals. One bishop blamed another, yet in truth the episcopate as a whole had proved incapable of resolving the dispute; only the intervention of secular authorities succeeded. Chlothild and Basina certainly deserved Gregory's rebuke, but their grievances with Leubovera might have warranted a little more regard than they received from his pen. Admittedly, Chlothild and Basina were arrogant, so much so that Leubovera's chief mistake was to try and run Holy Cross as it had been under Radegund, but without the late queen's prestige. Yet the two were also committed to the religious life, and Basina even returned to Holy Cross once her excommunication was lifted. She knew how cruel life might be outside the cloister: her mother and two of her brothers had been driven to their deaths by her stepmother, while her other brother had been killed in a military campaign, his body mutilated by his enemies and left in the field of battle.[49] Little surprise that, when her father tried to remove her from Holy Cross and marry her into the Visigothic royal family, she declined.[50] Gregory included these details in various places in his *Histories*, but not in his account of the scandal of 589. Here he was not inclined to sympathy, nor was his local audience keen to hear it.

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49 *Historiae*, IV. 50, V. 18, V. 39.

50 *Historiae*, VI. 34.

CHAPTER 4

Brides and Social Status

> A wife of noble character is the crown of her husband, but a wife who brings shame is like rot in his bones.
>
> PROVERBS 12:4

Introduction

A wise man seeks a bride of good character, high birth, wealth, and grace—yet most Merovingian kings were ruled not by wisdom but by whimsy and lust. This point Gregory argued throughout his *Histories* and especially within Book IV, where he critiqued several kings for their selection of women—wives and concubines alike—and linked this haphazard approach with the problems of political instability and civil wars: these women and their offspring inevitably vied for influence within the kingdom, and conflict ensued. Indeed, Gregory criticised these kings to such an extent that he even gave the impression they practiced polygamy. We will address this issue in detail in Chapter 5, but, in short, Gregory went too far: the Merovingians approached marriage, concubinage, and the production of heirs with rather more sense and discernment than he cared to admit. First, however, we must analyse Gregory's criteria for 'worthiness' as a theme within Book IV of the *Histories*—one interwoven with his description of civil wars and intrafamilial conflict. Only once these threads have been unwound can we start anew and produce something that better fits the Merovingians themselves, their reasoning and their rationale. Gregory gave many bad examples. Indeed, to hear him tell, since the days of Clovis and Chlothild the realm had witnessed little else. Only King Sigibert deserved unequivocal praise, as he married a supremely worthy bride, the Visigothic princess Brunhild, and produced heirs exclusively from her. Indeed, Gregory invested hopes for the future in their son Childebert II, whose accession to the Austrasian throne (in otherwise tragic circumstances) he mentioned at the conclusion of Book IV, recounting its place and the end of a reckoning of years from Creation.

Chlothild and Clovis: Introducing a Theme

In the *Histories*, Gregory introduced Chlothild as the ideal choice of bride, wisely selected by Clovis for her merits. The king first heard of the lovely girl—

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intelligent (*sapiens*), graceful (*elegans*), and royal (*de regio genere*)—when his envoys returned from visiting the Burgundian court.[1] There she had been kept by the Burgundian king, Gundobad, ever since he had ordered her parents to be killed (a crime which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, he may not have actually committed). Gregory continued his questionable account by asserting that the besotted Clovis requested to marry Chlothild straightaway, and Gundobad, afraid to offend the great Merovingian, gave his consent. Endearing though this story may be, we should remember that Gundobad was then the most formidable ruler in Gaul, holder of the prestigious title *magister militum*, and thus not likely to tremble at the thought of offending the upstart Clovis.[2] Indeed, a careful examination of other sources suggests a political context for the marriage. A letter written by Avitus of Vienne, for example, states that Gundobad had planned to marry his own daughter to an unnamed king just before she unexpectedly died sometime after 501. Though Avitus failed to identify the groom, a survey of royal dynasties reveals few other suitable candidates besides Clovis, raising the possibility that Chlothild had served as a replacement for the deceased girl.[3] A date of c. 501 for the marriage certainly fits the known chronological details of Clovis's reign.[4] And, furthermore, Gundobad stood to benefit from an alliance with his Merovingian neighbour at this time, given that his brother and subordinate, Godegisel, rebelled in 501.[5] Intriguingly, Clovis

1 *Historiae*, II. 28. The attribute '*de regio genere*' may have been intended to indicate more than just Chlothild's Burgundian royal lineage, since, according to Gregory, her grandfather Gundioc descended '*ex genere Athanarici regis*', i.e. from the Visigothic royalty; see Herwig Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten*, 2nd edn (Munich: Beck, 1979), p. 28 and n. 23. Against the historical value of this genealogical information, see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 215, n. 447; and Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', p. 255.

2 On Gundobad and the title *magister militum*, see Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp. 143–53.

3 On this and what follows, see Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, pp. 208–09. The letter is Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 5.

4 Clovis and Chlothild had at least six children, who were apparently all still very young when Clovis died in 511. For example, Chlothild's sons do not appear as politically active in the sources until 523, which suggests that they had only reached maturity shortly before this time. Furthermore, upon the division of the kingdom in 511, Chlothild's sons were made to share power with their adult half-brother Theuderic, who was Clovis's son from a concubine born years previously. Thus, Clovis's marriage to Chlothild must have been early enough to account for the births of their many children, but late enough to account for these children's immaturity throughout the 510s. For an alternative reckoning, favouring a much earlier date (494 or before), see Eugen Ewig, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', in *Frühmittelalterlichen Studien*, 8 (1974), 15–59 (p. 38).

5 Ennodius described Godegisel with the inferior designation *germanus regis* (rather than simply *rex*), which suggests that he was subordinate to his brother. See Ennodius, *Vita beatissimi*

had first supported Godegisel but then switched sides, leaving his former ally to a grim fate.[6] It seems far more likely, therefore, that Clovis's marriage to Chlothild resulted from these political manoeuvrings than from a chance encounter at court.[7]

Gregory continued his idealised presentation of the marriage in his account of Clovis's conversion to Christianity from polytheism. Chlothild urged her husband to stop worshipping idols and false gods (Gregory identified them as Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, and Mercury), but she found little success.[8] She asked her husband to allow their son Ingomer to be baptised, and when he refused, she arranged the ceremony anyway, decorating the church lavishly in the hope that sacred art, together with the majesty of the liturgy, might move the king to belief. Gregory thus asked his audience to believe that Chlothild had flagrantly overruled her husband's decision and then expected him to turn up at the ceremony which he had forbidden. Ingomer died soon after his baptism, yet, according to Gregory, Chlothild was still able to arrange the baptism of her next son, Chlodomer, though the king had not wavered in his unbelief. Only when Clovis faced sure defeat in a battle against the Alamanni did he turn to God and offer to convert if he achieved victory, beginning his prayer: 'O Jesus Christ, whom Chlothild has preached to be the Son of the living God [...]'.[9] A triumphant Clovis then sought catechesis from Remigius, bishop of Reims, and received baptised, together with his sister and over three thousand of his

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viri Epifani episcopi Ticinensis ecclesiae, 174, ed. by Friedrich Vogel, *MGH, AA*, vol. VII (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), pp. 84–109 (pp. 106). Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 18, includes the important, though seemingly incidental detail, that at the time of her engagement Chlothild was resident in Geneva (which seems to have been a centre of power for Godegisel).

6 See Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 33; *Historiae*, II. 32–33; and Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 500; with Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, pp. 17, 20–21.

7 This explains the otherwise confusing statement found in Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 18–19, that Aridius, a leading man loyal to Gundobad, objected to the marriage on the grounds that, though it may have seemed politically advantageous, it was in fact courting danger. See also *Vita Eptadii presbyteri Cervidunensis*, 8–9, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. III (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 184–94 (pp. 189–90); and *Liber historiae Francorum*, 12. Gregory mentioned Aridius in *Historiae*, II. 32. On the material found outside Gregory's account, see Isabelle Réal, 'Entre mari et femme: dons réciproques et gestions des biens à l'époque mérovingienne d'après les chroniques et les Vies de saints', in *Dots et douaires dans le haut Moyen Âge*, ed. by François Bougard, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 2002), pp. 389–406 (pp. 392–94).

8 *Historiae*, II. 29.

9 *Historiae*, II. 30.

men.[10] This number calls to mind the three thousand baptised at Pentecost in the Book of Acts.[11] Indeed, Gregory's entire account echoes biblical precedent. Chlothild's argument on the futility of worshiping 'wood, stone, and metal', for example, mirrors Deuteronomy 29:17 and Revelation 9:20–21, while Gregory's decision to place Chlothild at the centre of her husband's conversion recalls 1 Corinthians 7:14: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his believing wife'.

Scholarship has long debated the details of Clovis's conversion as recounted in the *Histories*.[12] For example, Gregory placed Clovis's battle with the Alamanni and his decisive prayer to the Christian God in 496—an early date which he relied upon to present the king's later campaigns against Arian opponents as sectarian conflicts motivated by zeal for the Catholic cause.[13] Two other sources, however, indicate that Clovis fought the Alamanni a full decade later,[14] while a letter written by Avitus of Vienne suggests that Clovis had only been baptised in 507 or 508.[15] This letter also hints that at first Clovis considered converting to Arianism (to which his sister, Lenteild, adhered) before he finally settled on Catholicism.[16] Moreover, Avitus praised Clovis for his

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10 *Historiae*, II. 31.

11 See Acts 2:41; with J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Long-Haired Kings', repr. in *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 148–248 (p. 170).

12 The argument here follows the revised chronology suggested by Ian Wood and Danuta Shanzer, among others. See Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, pp. 362–69; Danuta Shanzer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis: The Bishop of Vienne vs the Bishop of Tours', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 29–57; Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', pp. 637–41; and Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 41–49. For a complete historiography up to 1994, together with an analysis that unfortunately arrives at the wrong conclusion (more or less affirming Gregory's chronology), see Mark Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis, 1886–1993', *Early Medieval Europe*, 3 (1994), 97–116. As an addendum to Spencer's historiography, see also Matthias Becher, *Chlodwig I.: Der Aufstieg der Merowinger und das Ende der antiken Welt* (Munich: Beck, 2011).

13 See Ian Wood, 'Arians, Catholics, and Vouillé', in *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE: Where France Began*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 139–49.

14 These two sources are Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico*, ed. by Friedrich Vogel, *MGH, AA*, vol. VII (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), pp. 203–14; and Cassiodorus, *Variae*, II. 14, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *MGH, AA*, vol. XII (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894). See Shanzer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis', pp. 53–54.

15 Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 46. See Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', pp. 262–72.

16 Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, pp. 363–64. Lenteild's conversion to Arianism is indicated from Avitus of Vienne, *Homiliae*, 31 (the title of a lost sermon). On Arianism within

conversion without mentioning Chlothild or the battle against the Alamanni. This evidence strongly suggests that Gregory presented an inaccurate account of these events in his *Histories*—and even those scholars who, with great effort, might attempt to rescue Gregory's chronology would concede that his emphasis on Chlothild as the principle agent in Clovis's conversion is both conspicuous and extraordinary.

Gregory wrote over six decades removed from these events, at a time when Clovis's legacy as the great Catholic patriarch of the Merovingian dynasty was firmly established. Thus, he offered his audience a reiteration of what was by then the accepted interpretation for the king's career.[17] Gregory must not have been the first, for example, to call Clovis a 'great man and exceptional warrior', or to hail him as a 'new Constantine'.[18] Indeed, Clovis was a figure of very local importance for Gregory, given the elaborate ceremony that had taken place in Tours in 508, a year after the king's decisive victory over Alaric II in Vouillé:[19]

> Clovis received letters from the emperor Anastasius conferring the consulate, and in the church of the blessed Martin he was clothed in a purple tunic and the chlamys, and he set a diadem on his head. Then, mounting his horse, he dispensed gold and silver with his own hand, in great generosity, to the people gathered along the road that lies between the city gate and the cathedral. From that day onward he was hailed as if he were consul or emperor. Then he left Tours and came to Paris, where he established the seat of his rule.[20]

Clovis was thus honoured will all the trappings of the patriciate and enjoyed an *adventus* ceremony traditionally performed by Romans dignitaries of the

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Clovis's family, see Martina Hartmann, 'Gregor von Tours und arianische Königinnen oder hatte Chlodwig I. zwei oder drei Schwestern?', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 116 (2008), 130–37. There is also an implication in Cassiodorus, *Variae*, II. 40 that Theodoric did not consider Clovis to be a Christian in 506 or 507.

17 See Yitzhak Hen, 'Clovis, Gregory of Tours, and Pro-Merovingian Propaganda', in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 71 (1993), 271–76.

18 *Historiae*, II. 12 and II. 31.

19 On the location, which has been a matter of debate, see Ralph W. Mathisen, 'Vouillé, Voulon, and the Location of the Campus Vogladensis', in *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE: Where France Began*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 43–61.

20 *Historiae*, II. 38.

highest rank.[21] The enduring memory of this event in Gregory's city surely created an atmosphere that obscured the inconvenient details of the illustrious king's career, such as his initial inferiority to Gundobad or his early flirtation with of Arianism.[22] As we discussed in Chapter 1, Chlothild had spent the great majority of her widowhood, which lasted for over three decades, in Tours, and she surely played a crucial role in shaping the material that reached Gregory a generation later.[23] Indeed, this might explain her prominence in Gregory's narrative at the expense of other figures like Remigius of Reims, who surely deserved more attention for catechising and baptising the king.[24] With this traditional material to hand, Gregory possessed everything he needed to uphold Chlothild as the perfect bride, her union to Clovis an ideal worthy of emulation.

This also explains why Gregory all but erased Clovis's concubine, who gave birth to Theuderic I, from the *Histories*—mentioned in only one sentence, and never named. Gregory referenced her in passing as he segued from Clovis and Chlothild's marriage to the birth of their first child:

> When the king saw Chlothild, he was very pleased, and he took her in marriage. He already had a son named Theuderic from a concubine. From Queen Chlothild his firstborn child was a son, and she wanted to have him baptised [. . .].[25]

21 See Ralph W. Mathisen, 'Clovis, Anastasius, and Political Status in 508 CE: The Frankish Aftermath of the Battle of Vouillé', in *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE: Where France Began*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 79–110. See also Michael McCormick, 'Clovis at Tours: Byzantine Public Ritual and the Origins of Medieval Ruler Symbolism', in *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, ed. by Evangelos Chrysos and Andreas Schwarcz (Vienna: Böhlau, 1989), pp. 155–80.

22 Another tradition, also set in Tours, remembered an unbaptised Clovis journeying to St Martin's church sometime before the year 500 and professing his desire to be baptised without delay. (The story is doubtful since Tours was under Visigothic control at the time.) See *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, no. 8.

23 One need not follow the imaginative hypothesis that Chlothild personally related the events to a very young Gregory, as suggested by Wolfram Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwig's Übergang zum Christentum: Eine quellen kritische Studie', in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 12 (1932), 417–501 (p. 476).

24 See Jo Ann McNamara, '*Imitatio Helenae*: Sainthood as an Attribute of Queenship', in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. by Sandro Sticca (New York, 1996), pp. 51–80 (pp. 60–61). This becomes even more significant if one accepts that Remigius had been an early pro-Merovingian propagandist, as suggested by Hen, 'Clovis, Gregory of Tours, and Pro-Merovingian Propaganda', pp. 274–76.

25 *Historiae*, II. 28–29.

The brevity with which Gregory mentioned and then dismissed this woman is remarkable. Of course, he could not avoid reference to her entirely, since her son, Theuderic I, and grandson, Theudebert I, ruled for many years (511–33 and 533–48, respectively) and were remembered in his own day.[26] But he was as brief as possible, brushing this woman aside as a mere memory of Clovis's pagan years. The king's path to Christianity began when he chose Chlothild to be his bride, and she had caught his attention for the right reasons: good character, high birth, intellect, and grace. Gregory thus reinforced his argument that the right choice of bride brought a king both temporal and eternal prosperity. As for Clovis's former concubine, she was best forgot.

Royal Marriages as a Theme in Book IV of the Histories

In a monograph published in 1994, Martin Heinzelmann demonstrated that Gregory divided his *Histories* into ten books to structure his various themes, and that he opened each book with material carefully chosen to highlight the key issues that followed.[27] Though Gregory did not limit each book to a single theme, he carefully managed the thematic content of his *Histories* to ensure that each book acquired its own particular character. With Heinzelmann's analysis in mind, it can be said that Book IV paid particular attention to royal marital policy, presenting several examples of Merovingian kings who acted foolishly or wisely and the consequences. Gregory preferred bad examples, which he linked to political and social discord throughout Book IV up to the opening of Book V (where he specifically addressed the topics of civil war and intrafamilial conflict, presenting Clovis's reign as a lost golden age).[28] In comparison, Gregory opened Book IV with a section entitled 'On the Death of Queen Chlothild', which recalled her marriage to Clovis and their prosperous rule:

> Queen Chlothild died in Tours, full of days and rich in good works, in the time of Bishop Injuriosus. She was carried to Paris with great chanting of psalms to be buried in the holy church of St Peter, at the side of King

26 See Roger Collins, 'Theudebert I, "*Rex Magnus Francorum*"', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. by Patrick Wormald (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 6–33.

27 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 84–136 and especially 106–13. Heinzelmann referred to the prologues as the *Gebrauchsanweisung* for each book (p. 106). See also Brunhölzl, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol. I, pp. 133–37.

28 See Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V'.

> Clovis, next to her sons, the kings Childebert and Chlothar. She had built this very basilica, in which blessed Geneviève had been laid to rest.[29]

It must be said that Heinzelmann himself failed to address this passage in his analysis of Book IV, describing the second chapter as the 'start of the book' (*Buchanfang*) and focusing instead on the conflicts between kings that recurred throughout the subsequent chapters.[30] This oversight is remarkable, especially since the second chapter of Book IV did not focus on a conflict between kings but on Chlothar pledging loyalty to St Martin (after initially provoking the saint's anger). With the third chapter, Gregory began his discussion of royal marriages in detail, recounting Chlothar's many unions. The theme of civil war did not feature properly until chapter thirteen. Certainly, Gregory discussed conflicts between royals in Book IV, but in a manner that complemented his points about marital policy. Heinzelmann's oversight is unfortunately consistent with his general indifference to the women in the *Histories*, in marked contrast to Gregory's own literary interests.

Gregory foreshadowed the link between poor marital policy and civil strife in Book III with his account of the conflict between Sigistrix and his father Sigismund, a king who ruled Burgundy before its annexation by the Merovingians. According to Gregory, Sigismund remarried following the death of his first wife, Ostrogotha, but his new wife began to cause his son trouble, 'as is the way of stepmothers'.[31] Sigistrix was finally compelled to confront his stepmother when he saw her wearing Ostrogotha's clothing during the celebration of the liturgy, shouting: 'You are not worthy to have such garments covering your back, because they belonged to your *domina*, my mother.' Offended and embarrassed, Sigistrix's stepmother began to convince Sigismund that his son was planning to usurp the kingdom. Sigismund, 'heeding the council of his evil wife', had his son drink wine until he passed out and then instructed two servants to strangle him. Gregory did not fabricate this murder, which finds confirmation in the *Chronicle* of Marius of Avenches,[32] but he went out of his way to stress that Sigismund's fears had been without foundation and that Sigistrix's death was a crime instigated by a scheming, evil second wife.

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29 *Historiae*, IV. 1.

30 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 122–24 (see particularly p. 123, n. 93).

31 See *Historiae*, III. 5. On the evil stepmother as a common motif, see David Noy, 'Wicked Stepmothers in Roman Society and Imagination', *Journal of Family History*, 16 (1991), 345–61; and M. J. G. Grey-Fow, 'The Wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: An Evaluation', *Latomus*, 47 (1988), 741–57.

32 Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 522.

Gregory had little interest in understanding how Sigistrix might have presented a genuine threat to the inheritance of his stepmother's children. We should observe, therefore, that Sigistrix was much older and more established in the kingdom than his stepbrothers, and that his mother, Ostrogotha, had been the daughter of the Ostrogothic king, Theodoric the Great. Indeed, as the grandson of the sonless Theodoric, Sigistrix had a fair claim to rule not only Burgundy but also Italy, which would have made him the most powerful ruler west of Constantinople.

In regards to Book IV, Gregory raised the issue of poor marital policy as early as his third chapter, which he began by listing Chlothar's 'seven sons from different women', including the concubine Chunsina and two sisters, Ingund and Aregund.[33] Gregory then indulged in telling his audience how the king came to marry the siblings. First Chlothar married Ingund, his former slave (*ancilla*), who then asked him to find a suitable match for her servile sister, so that she too might be elevated in status. Upon hearing this, however, Chlothar began to desire Aregund for himself, 'because he was exceedingly lustful' (*cum esset nimium luxoriosus*), and so he went to the villa where she lived and arranged to marry her himself. He then returned to Ingund and told her the good news:

> I have done the favour that you, my sweetness, asked of me. You wanted a man both wealth and wise for me to join to your sister, and I have found no one more worthy than myself.

Gregory clearly wished this story to be both embarrassing and entertaining, but he also wished to make a deeper point about the relationship between marital policy and civil strife. Later in Book IV, he recounted with sorrow the wars between Aregund's son Chilperic and Ingund's sons Sigibert and Guntram, which reached their tragic climax in the Book's final passages when Sigibert, bent on fratricide, was assassinated by the agents of his brother's wife.[34]

Gregory had personally experienced the consequences of this conflict when Chilperic's army (under the command of his son, Theudebert) rampaged through the Touraine and the Limousin:

33 *Historiae*, IV. 3.

34 *Historiae*, IV. 22, IV. 50–51. There are hints that Chilperic may have been Chlothar's most favoured son in Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX. 1, which in turn suggests that, amongst the mothers, Aregund may have enjoyed the most influence. See Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1981), p. 311. For reservations about this interpretation, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, p. 75, n. 10.

> Theudebert burned churches, confiscated their plate, executed priests, destroyed monasteries, made sport of nuns, and laid waste to everything. There was a greater cry of sorrow in the churches than had occurred even in the time of the persecution of Diocletian.[35]

Neither was it the only conflict started by Chlothar's sons that impacted Gregory personally. In 555, Chunsina's son Chramn rebelled against his father, hoping to carve out a share of the kingdom for himself; initially he found support from his uncle Childebert, but he was eventually defeated when half-brothers Charibert and Guntram (sons of Ingund) joined forces against him.[36] Chlothar locked Chramn in a pauper's cottage along with his wife and daughters and burned the building to the ground—a fate that echoed the demise of the emperor Valens after his infamous defeat at Adrianople.[37] This conflict tore through Gregory's native region of Clermont, while two of Chramn's supporters also set fire to St Martin's church in Tours.[38] Similar disruption came on another occasion, this time in the 580s, when a would-be king named Gundovald returned to Gaul from his exile in Constantinople, claiming to be Chlothar's son from a concubine, and launched a military campaign to acquire his due share of the kingdom at his half-brothers' expense (though Gregory recounted this event, unlike Chramn's rebellion, outside of Book IV).[39]

Gregory was critical of Chlothar's other relationships as well. Indeed, the king's only suitably chosen wife, the Thuringian princess Radegund, left his side

35 *Historiae*, IV. 47.

36 *Historiae*, IV. 16. The date derives from the year of Theudebald's death, on which see Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 555. On Chramn's revolt, see Julia Hofmann, 'The Men Who Would be Kings: Challenges to Royal Authority in the Frankish Regna, *c.* 500–700' (unpublished doctoral thesis: Oxford, Queen's College, Hilary Term 2008), pp. 72–111; Konrad Bund, *Thronsturz und Herrscherabsetzung im Frühmittelalter* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1979), pp. 255–58; and Heike Grahn-Hoek, *Die fränkische Oberschicht im 6. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer rechtlichen und politischen Stellung* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1976), pp. 185–88.

37 *Historiae*, IV. 20. On Valens, see Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXXI. xiii, 14–15.

38 See *Historiae*, IV. 13, IV. 16, IV. 20, IX. 31; and *Gloria martyrum*, 65.

39 On Gundovald's ultimately failed bid for a throne, see Marc Widdowson, 'Gundovald, "Ballomer" and the Problems of Identity', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 86 (2008), 607–22; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 93–101; Constantin Zuckerman, 'Qui a rappelé en Gaule le ballomer Gondovald?', *Francia*, 25 (1998), 1–18; Bernard Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568–586)* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994); Ulrich Nonn, '"*Ballomeris quidam*": Ein merowingischer Prätendent des VI. Jahrhunderts', in *Arbor amoena comis*, ed. by Ewald Könsgen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), pp. 35–40; and Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West', pp. 94–105.

because, according to Gregory, he had ruthlessly ordered the execution of her brother (which we discussed in Chapter 3). Gregory had recounted Radegund's history in Book III;[40] within the pages of Book IV, Chlothar only selected poor matches for himself. For example, Chlothar formed a sexual relationship with Wuldetrada, the widow of his half-brother's grandson Theudebald, and this brought him the rebuke of several bishops, presumably on the grounds that the relationship violated incest prohibitions.[41] Once again, Gregory declined to explain Chlothar's motives, leaving his audience with the impression that the king had been driven by lust. And he flavoured his account with a dash of sleaze:

> Chlothar took Theudebald's kingdom and his wife, sleeping with Wuldetrada under his very bed-sheets; but Chlothar was chastised by the bishops and so gave her up, passing her on to Garivald, his *dux*.[42]

Lust aside, Chlothar clearly had other motives for seeking a union with Wuldetrada, who was the daughter of a Lombard king and a Gepid princess—a background that Gregory crucially neglected to mention.[43] And although Gregory did not describe this expressly as a marriage, implying the added disgrace of fornication, in all likelihood Chlothar had intended to marry Wuldetrada and thereby secure his claim to her late husband's domains via the legitimacy imparted by a union to the dowager queen.[44] Chlothar had made similar arrangements many years previously, when in 524 he had married

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40 *Historiae*, III. 7.

41 On the Merovingian church and incest prohibitions, see Hubertus Lutterbach, *Sexualität im Mittelalter: Eine Kulturstudie anhand von Bußbüchern des 6. bis 12. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 30–32, 166–94, 217–20; Ian Wood, 'Incest, Law, and the Bible in Sixth-Century Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 291–303; Mayke de Jong, 'An Unsolved Riddle: Early Medieval Incest Legislation', in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by Ian Wood (San Marino: Boydell, 1998), 107–25 (pp. 115–16); and Paul Mikat, *Die Inzestgesetzgebung der merowingisch-fränkischen Konzilien (511–626/7)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994).

42 *Historiae*, IV. 9.

43 For Wuldetrada's background (as the daughter of Waccho and Austriguna), see Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, I. 21, ed. by Ludwig Berthmann and Georg Waitz, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX* (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), pp. 12–187 (pp. 59–60).

44 On the political context for Chlothar's marriage to Wuldetrada, see Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 283–84.

Guntheuca, the widow of his brother Chlodomer, after the latter's untimely demise.[45] Gregory also chose not to specify exactly which bishops objected to Chlothar's marriage to Wuldetrada, giving the impression that the whole episcopate had expressed a collective disapproval on moral grounds. Yet the bishops were surely too entwined in Merovingian political networks to speak with one voice against the king regardless of their loyalties. Whatever the case, Chlothar resolved the controversy by marrying Wuldetrada to his leading official, Garivald, thus maintaining a link to her while avoiding personal criticism.[46]

Gregory also had harsh words for the marital arrangements of other kings, including those of Chlothar's son Guntram. This may be surprising, since Gregory praised Guntram on other occasions, even crediting him with a miracle (a woman used the threads of Guntram's royal cloak to cure her son).[47] Some historians have gone as far as to suggest that Gregory presented Guntram as an ideal monarch in his *Histories*.[48] But Gregory also detailed the king's shortcomings, never more so than in his account of the king's marriages. (Indeed, it may be that Gregory's occasional flatteries were inspired more by fear than admiration for a king who exerted influence in Tours at various

45 *Historiae*, III. 6. Gregory kept quiet about Guntheuca's background, too. Unlike Wuldetrada, Guntheuca's pedigree cannot be discerned from other sources, but the presence of the element *Gun-* in her name might imply a connection to the Burgundian ruling family, since it was shared by the Burgundian kings Gundioc, Gundobad, and Gunthar. This also fits the context for the marriage, which occurred after a Merovingian campaign against Burgundy.

46 The statement in Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 54 that Chlothar sent Wuldetrada and her two daughters into exile is likely a confusion with the fate of Ultrogotha.

47 *Historiae*, IX. 21. This passage calls to mind the miraculous cure of the woman with a haemorrhage of blood in the Gospels (Matthew 9:20–23; Mark 5:25–34; and Luke 8:43–48). Yet even this passage has been viewed as 'a secretive way of signalling disagreement with Austrasian policy', rather than as outright praise for the king, as explained in Wood, 'The Secret Histories', p. 261.

48 Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, pp. 106–18; Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*; Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine*, pp. 421–25; Henry Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), pp. 88–91; Bund, *Thronsturz und Herrscherabsetzung*, p. 270; and Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 178, 208, 225–27, who labelled Guntram as one of 'three virtuous kings' in the *Histories*. In a nuanced interpretation, Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 238–40 regarded Gregory's meeting with Guntram in 585 as a turning point, after which he decided that Guntram was a good king. Yet it is not clear that this sufficiently explains everything in Gregory's account of the king.

times.)[49] Gregory began by writing that the 'good king' (*bonus rex*) Guntram had a son from a concubine named Veneranda, who was the slave (*ancilla*) of one of his loyal men. This may have represented a breach of etiquette between patron and client. Guntram then married Marcatrude and had a son from her as well.[50] Describing the two women as 'rivals' (*aemulae*), Gregory wrote that Marcatrude, who was of higher birth, poisoned Veneranda's son, only to lose her own son soon thereafter 'by the judgement of God' (*iudicio Dei*). Guntram hated Marcatrude for this crime and he dismissed her from his side, marrying her father's household slave (*ex familia*), Austrechild, in her place.[51] When Marcatrude's brothers objected to this disgrace, Guntram had them executed and their property confiscated.[52] And when Sagittarius, bishop of Gap, questioned the ability of Austrechild's sons to inherit a share of the kingdom (to which we shall return below), Guntram sent him off to a monastery and confiscated his property as well.[53]

Guntram pursued Veneranda and Austrechild regardless of the insult this caused his leading men. Neither did Guntram consider the consequences of taking several women to bed and producing sons from each of them. Gregory emphasised that the king found no reward for his behaviour: not only did his sons from Veneranda and Marcatrude die, but Austrechild's two sons also perished (from illness in their youth), leaving Guntram with no natural-born heir. Austrechild herself also fell mortally, and Gregory took the opportunity to present her as an evil woman who had led her husband astray:

> Breathing heavily, Austrechild knew that the end could not be avoided. Yet before she exhaled her wicked soul, she wanted to make others partake in her mortal demise, so that the wailings and lamentations accompanying their funerals might become part of her own. She is said to have made a request to the king reminiscent of Herod, stating: 'I might still hope of living, if I had not been led to my death by the hands of iniquitous doctors, for the medicines which they compelled me to take have brought my life to ruin, rapidly stealing the light of this world from me. And so I beg you to swear an oath to slay them with this very sword the moment the light leaves me, lest my death go unpunished. Just as I am no

49 See Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', pp. 347–50; Wood, 'The Secret Histories', pp. 259–63; and Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', pp. 44–45.

50 *Historiae*, IV. 25.

51 *Historiae*, V. 20.

52 *Historiae*, V. 17.

53 *Historiae*, V. 20.

> longer able to live and flourish, neither should they prosper. Instead, let there be one sorrow felt all the same by theirs and mine.' With these words she gave up her miserable soul.[54]

Guntram, bound by his oath, duly carried out his wife's last request. Gregory added, with satirical understatement: 'Those who had sense knew that this was not done without sin.'

It is difficult to square this passage and its concluding comment with the supposedly heroic Guntram of the *Histories*. Writing years later, Fredegar apparently found this episode awkward, since he omitted it from his *Chronicles*, which presented Guntram straightforwardly as 'a good king, fearing God'.[55] Curiously, Gregory suggested that Guntram knew better than to marry lowborn women, since his brother, Charibert, had married a shepherd's daughter, Theudogild (as discussed below and previously in Chapter 1). After Charibert's death, Theudogild offered herself in marriage to Guntram, who unashamedly feigned acceptance only to trick her out of her wealth and send her away to a monastery. Gregory then had Guntram utter an ironic justification: 'It is proper that her treasure should belong to me, rather than to a woman who was unworthy (*indigna*) to approach my brother's bed'.[56] This occurred c. 567, long before Austrechild's death in 580, so Guntram was speaking not out of hindsight but out of sanctimony.[57] Gregory's point, however, was not to insult Guntram for the sake of it, but to show how a poorly chosen wife might corrupt a king and his legacy. His reference to Guntram as a *bonus rex* reinforced this point: even a good king might be ruined by taking the wrong women to bed.

Next in Book IV, Gregory detailed the marital habits of Guntram's brother Charibert, who made the mistake of casting aside his first wife Ingoberg in favour of a series of lowborn girls. Gregory clearly held Ingoberg in high regard, describing her as 'a very prudent woman, especially gifted in the religious life, diligent in her vigils, prayers, and almsgiving'.[58] Charibert had done well to select her as his wife, but unfortunately he then started to take interest in two

54 *Historiae*, V. 35. Herod the Great, of biblical infamy, had issued a similar command, according to Josephus, because he feared that his death would be celebrated rather than mourned. See Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. vi, 174–75.

55 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 56. See also III. 77 and III. 82, where some of the relevant material is safely tucked away.

56 *Historiae*, IV. 26.

57 The events relating to Theudogild occurred not long after Charibert's death in 567 (*Historiae*, IV. 26). Austrechild's death followed a plague that killed many in 580, including members of the royalty (*Historiae*, V. 34–35).

58 *Historiae*, IX. 26.

of her slaves, the sisters Merofled and Marcovefa. Jealous of the attention they received, Ingoberg put their father to work and then called her husband into the room, in the hope that Charibert would see the woolworker (*artifex lanariae*) toiling away and lose interest in his daughters. Gregory described the man as a *pauper*, and he must have been of very low social status considering that textile production was usually done by women.[59] Charibert flew into a rage at the sight of the humble worker, but he aimed his anger at his wife, rather than the two girls, and he cast Ingoberg from his side, taking Merofled in her place. Even more outrageously, he later he married Marcovefa, even though she lived under religious vows.[60] The marriage, which also violated prohibitions against incest, earned Charibert an excommunication from Germanus, Bishop of Paris.[61] The couple paid dearly for their offence: 'Because the king refused to get rid of her, Marcovefa was struck dead by the judgement of God, and not long after Charibert followed her to the grave'.[62] Worse still, he died without an heir, with Gregory laconically adding: 'Charibert also had another girl (*puella*), who was the daughter of a shepherd [...], named Theudogild, who is said to have produced for him a son no sooner born than buried.'[63] Four different women but no surviving sons: like his brother Guntram, and like their father Chlothar before, Charibert failed to chose his sexual partners wisely. This brought him not only disgrace but, indeed, damnation.

Sigibert and Chilperic: Contrasting Examples

'When King Sigibert saw that his brothers were taking unworthy wives and even joining themselves to slaves in worthless marriages,' Gregory wrote, 'he

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59 Though spinning was an exclusively female activity, weaving was occasionally performed by men, usually slaves. See Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World,* AD *275–425* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 146–47.

60 *Historiae*, IV. 26.

61 See Wood, 'Incest, Law, and the Bible', p. 302 and n. 77; Ewig, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', p. 30.

62 *Historiae*, IV. 26. Gregory had personal reasons to despise Marcovefa, since she had acted as a patroness to his nemesis, Leudast, a man known for lustfulness (*cupiditas*), decadence (*luxuria*), and materialism (*vanitas*) (*Historiae*, V. 48–49), sinful qualities that put him in rather bad company in Gregory's works; see Danuta Shanzer, 'History, Romance, Love, and Sex in Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 395–418 (p. 398).

63 *Historiae*, IV. 26. Gregory may have expected his audience to understand the boy's premature death as a divine reprimand for Charibert's sexual misbehaviour, viewed in light of the biblical account of King David in 2 Samuel 12:14.

sent a delegation to Hispania with many gifts to ask for Brunhild, the daughter of King Athanagild.'[64] Gregory described Brunhild in complimentary terms reminiscent of Chlothild; she was 'charming' (*venusta*), 'honourable' (*honesta*), 'splendid' (*decora*), 'sensible' (*prudens*), 'pleasant' (*blanda*), 'refined' (*elegans*), and, of course, royal (*filia regis*)—a suitable match for the king and an asset to his kingdom.[65] Gregory also noted that Brunhild brought with her a sizable treasure and converted from Arianism to Catholicism. Unlike the other kings mentioned in Book IV, Sigibert never sought another wife or a concubine. And he had a son from Brunhild, Childebert II, who lived to inherit his kingdom. Gregory made this point his final line of prose in Book IV – 'after the death of Sigibert, his son Childebert ruled in his stead'—followed only by a calculation of years from Creation to Sigibert's death in 575.[66] Since the only other book of the *Histories* to end with a similar reckoning of years is the final tenth book, it seems that Gregory regarded the accession of Childebert II to the throne as marking an epoch. Indeed, Gregory used Childebert's regnal years as the chronological framework for Books V–X, an unusual choice given that Tours was under the dominion of Chilperic and Guntram during most of the years recounted in these books.[67] For Gregory, the succession of Childebert II revealed the merits of Sigibert's marital policy, which had been based on wisdom and considered choice rather than whimsy and lust.

Although other kings had managed to arrange one promising marriage to a suitable bride, Sigibert succeeded because he remained faithful to Brunhild. Thus, Chlothar had married Radegund and Charibert had married Ingoberg, only to dismiss them, while Guntram's choice of the highborn Marcatrude might have proved fitting had he not also produced a son from the slave Veneranda.

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64 *Historiae*, IV. 27.

65 On the compliments commonly used when describing queens, see Claire Thiellet, *Femmes, reines et raintes* (*V^e–XIe siècle*) (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004), pp. 45–48, 53–56. Brunhild's virtues were also praised by Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 1.

66 *Historiae*, IV. 51. This was the first moment when Gregory mentioned Childebert II by name, though earlier he had referred vaguely to the 'children' (*filii*, which necessarily included at least one son) of Sigibert and Brunhild.

67 See Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 148–51 and n. 11. On pp. 29–30, Breukelaar expressed caution regarding the hypothesis that Gregory originally intended Books I–IV to serve as a stand-alone publication, as suggested by Buchner, *Gregor von Tours*, vol. I, pp. xx–xxv, and others, most notably Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 97–201. Also relevant here is the hypothesis of Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V', pp. 311–12, who suggested that Gregory was inspired to write by the tumultuous events of the mid-570s and that he began with the preface to Book V. Each of these hypotheses agrees that the end of Book IV marks an important thematic and structural moment within the *Histories*.

Immediately following his description of Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild, Gregory reinforced his point about fidelity by recounting the marriages of Sigibert's brother, Chilperic. Inspired by his brother's example, Chilperic sought to marry Brunhild's sister, Galswinth, 'although he already had many wives' (a choice of words which we shall address in Chapter 5).[68] Chilperic agreed to dismiss these 'wives' as a prerequisite to marrying the princess. After the union, however, discord arose 'due to Chilperic's love for Fredegund, whom he had had previously', as Gregory put it. Galswinth asked to return to her family and even offered to leave her sizeable dowry behind, but Chilperic refused, arranging to have her murdered instead. Gregory left no doubt about his opinions on the matter, interrupting his narrative to recount a miracle that occurred at Galswinth's tomb, identifying her as a saint, perhaps even a martyr. Meanwhile, Chilperic mourned Galswinth's death for 'a few days' and then took Fredegund back in marriage. As a final remark, Gregory added that Chilperic's brothers 'threw him out of the kingdom' (*eum a regno deieciunt*), by which he presumably meant to connect Galswinth's murder to Sigibert's launching of an (ultimately unsuccessful) war against his brother, recounted near the end of Book IV.[69] Gregory regarded this civil war as a tragedy, one made all the worse by its gruesome conclusion, in which Sigibert was assassinated on Fredegund's orders.[70] For the remainder of the *Histories*, Gregory detailed the sad consequences of Chilperic's decision to replace Galswinth with Fredegund, whose many crimes included the purging of Chilperic's sons from his former wife, Audovera.[71]

Base Women, Base Children?

Although Gregory illustrated his points through a series of examples rather than through discursive analysis, he did at least list the qualities that made a woman suitable for a king. As we have seen, he described Chlothild as *sapiens, elegans*, and *de regio genere*, and Brunhild as *prudens, honesta, decora, venusta,*

68 *Historiae*, IV. 28.

69 Gregory began his account of the civil war between Sigibert and Chilperic in *Historiae*, IV. 49. That Chilperic was never actually thrown out of his kingdom caused the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum* to amend the words '*eum a regno deieciunt*' to read '*eum de regno deiecere voluerunt*' in chapter 31. On this, see Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 44.

70 *Historiae*, IV. 51.

71 *Historiae*, V. 14, V. 39.

blanda, elegans, and *filia regis*. Predictably, Gregory's examples of poor matches feature the opposite traits: Austrechild had the vanity of the biblical villain Herod; Marcovefa forsook her religious vows and died unrepentant; Fredegund committed every sin imaginable (as we shall see in Chapter 6); and Theudogild coveted her status and political influence so much that she was desperate to remarry once her husband died. These women were also lowborn: Gregory described Austrechild as servile (*ex familia*), Theudogild as the daughter of a shepherd, and Marcovefa as the daughter of a poor woolworker. Fredegund, too, was of servile background, as suggested by a story Gregory related in which her own daughter, Rigunth, boasted that she was the real *domina* and that her mother owed her *servitio*.[72] Similarly, Sigistrix had berated his stepmother for being unworthy (*non digna*) in comparison to his mother, who had been her *domina*.[73] Gregory also called attention to the low birth of other women: Ingund (*famula, ancilla*), Aregund (*serva*), Veneranda (*ancilla*), as well as Merofled and Marcovefa (who lived *in servitium*). In contrast, Gregory's worthy brides were highborn: Brunhild, Galswinth, and Chlothild were princesses, while Ingoberg must have been of high station given that she paraded Merofled and Marcovefa's woolworker father before her husband in the hopes that this would cause him to lose interest. Gregory also criticised some royal unions that involved women of high birth, but in these instances he did not make the women's status especially clear. We have already seen how he passed over Wuldetrada's royal birth. Likewise, Gregory identified Chramn's unnamed wife only as the daughter of a certain Wilichar, but this Wilichar may have been the *comes* of Orléans of the same name.[74] Gregory provided no specifics regarding Marcatrude's background, but incidental details in his account suggest that she was of high birth: her family clearly owned a significant amount of property (which Guntram later confiscated), and she enjoyed the support of important figures like Sagittarius, who confronted Guntram on her behalf. Clearly, Gregory expected more than high birth from an exemplary match, yet, as this formed one of his essential criteria, he passed over the high birth of otherwise unworthy women so as not to complicate his theme.

72 *Historiae*, IX. 34. Fredegund was expressly referred to as a slave in *Liber historiae Francorum*, 31.

73 *Historiae*, III. 5.

74 *Historiae*, IV. 17. See Rouche, *L'Aquitaine, des Wisigoths aux Arabes*, p. 63. Such an identification has the advantage of explaining why Chramn enjoyed the support of men from Orléans during his revolt, as mentioned in *Gloria martyrum*, 65. Chramn's wife was named Chalda in *Liber historiae Francorum*, 28.

Sagittarius's argument that the children of Marcatrude's lowborn rival, Austrechild, ought not inherit a share of the kingdom deserves further attention, since it represented a threat to many kings, and not merely to Guntram alone. Indeed, it was so incendiary that Gregory made a point to disown it in his account of the confrontation:

> Sagittarius began to speak against the king and say that his sons were not able to inherit (*capere non possint*) because their mother [Austrechild] had been taken to the king's bed from among the slaves (*ex familia*) of Magnachar. He was not aware that, regardless of their mothers' birth status (*genus*), those who have been sired by kings are called kings' sons (*regis liberi*).[75]

Gregory could hardly have done other than disown Sagittarius's argument, considering that all the kings of his day (that is, after Chlothar's death in 561) were the offspring of former slaves, with the exception of Childebert II. Yet in his denial Gregory still managed to raise the issue, and indeed his 'counterargument' against Sagittarius may have been more gossamer than first appears. The *Codex Theodosianus* stated that children born from a free man and an unfree woman acquired the status of their mother.[76] Gregory's remarks clearly indicate that this law did not apply when the father was a Merovingian, as the children were considered freeborn, but perhaps this was the extent of it: narrowly read, his words did not mean that such *regis liberi* were necessarily entitled to a share of the kingdom.[77]

Sagittarius himself, curiously enough, latter appears in the *Histories* as a supporter of Gundovald, a usurper who justified his claim to the throne on the grounds that he was the son of Chlothar—from a concubine.[78] Sagittarius may simply have embraced hypocrisy when convenient, especially if his confrontation with Guntram had indeed been a political favour for Marcatrude rather than a principled stand. But even hypothesising such pragmatism on his part only adds to the sense of artificiality present in Gregory's account. Indeed, Sagittarius's point about Guntram's potential heirs was moot, since

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75 *Historiae*, V. 20.

76 *Codex Theodosianus*, IV. 6, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, P. M. Meyer, and P. Krüger, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, 3 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905).

77 On this, see also Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', p. 165; and Wood, 'The Secret Histories', pp. 262–63.

78 *Historiae*, VII. 29.

Austrechild's two sons had died of illness while still young.[79] In the years that followed, however, others stood to gain from the argument Gregory put in Sagittarius's mouth. One beneficiary stands out in particular: Brunhild, the mother of Childebert II and the only queen mother of high birth following her son's succession in 575. Was Gregory cautiously giving voice to her position? As we shall see in Chapter 7, Gregory had a close relationship with Brunhild and her Austrasian court. Later, Brunhild attempted something similar when she attacked her own grandson, Theudebert II, by claiming that he was the son of a gardener. Though centred on Theudebert II's paternity rather than the status of his mother, this argument sought to leverage doubts about Theudebert's ancestry to undermine his claim to the throne.[80] Whatever the case, Gregory's inclusion of Sagittarius's argument gave yet more support to his view that kings did best to avoid having sons from lowborn women.

Conclusion

Marriage to lowborn women was never likely to impress Gregory, who belonged to a prestigious senatorial family and who considered sexual pleasure to be a temptation the led one away from an uncompromising devotion to God. Of course, Gregory often showed concern for the poor and the servile in his writings, but he disliked those who ambitiously and unashamedly pursued worldly advance beyond their station. The most obvious example of this is his personal nemesis Leudast, whose rise and fall—from slave, to *comes* of Tours, to political fugitive and death by torture—Gregory detailed with a sense of satisfaction that justice had ultimately been done.[81] But Gregory expressed this sentiment elsewhere. In one example, full of historical inaccuracies, Gregory rebuked Clovis's niece, Amalasuntha, because she fell in love with a slave named Traguilla.[82] Alarmed, her mother Audofleda begged her not to degrade her 'highborn station' (*nobile genus*). As the daughter of a king, she was meant to marry a king's son and nothing less. When Amalasuntha and Traguilla eloped, Audofleda hunted them down, ordering her daughter to be beaten and the slave killed. In revenge, Amalasuntha murdered her mother by poisoning the chalice she

79 *Historiae*, V. 17. See also Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 577.

80 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 27.

81 *Historiae*, V. 14, V. 47–49, VI. 32.

82 *Historiae*, III. 31.

used for holy communion, which Gregory found appalling.[83] Outraged though he may have been, Gregory greatly misunderstood these events: Amalasuntha had actually been married to Flavius Eutharic Cilliga, precisely because her father valued the groom's royal pedigree.[84] Whatever Gregory's source for this material, the vehemence with which he attacked Amalasuntha was his own, derived from his sense of honour and his investment in the social order.

Gregory was hardly alone in his list of qualities for a suitable bride. For example, his younger contemporary, Isidore of Seville, wrote:

> In choosing a wife, four things move a man to love: beauty (*pulchritudo*), lineage (*genus*), wealth (*divitae*), and character (*mores*). Although it is better to look for character rather than wealth, in our times men are more interested in money and physical appearance (*forma*) than upright behaviour (*probitas morum*).[85]

Such criteria appeared frequently in the writings of Roman authors in earlier centuries and, of course, even more broadly. They represented the values of an aristocratic culture with deep roots in the classical past.[86] Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that such attributes were valued ubiquitously, even in Merovingian Gaul. Clearly, the kings Gregory criticised for their choice of bride had their own set of criteria by which they selected a suitable match. And, as we shall see in the following chapter, their behaviour was not necessarily motivated by lust over reason. To select a bride without regard for her wealth or lineage was to signal one's own power and security, acting without the same concerns that weighed down upon the aristocracy. We should not be fooled into believing that Gregory merely gave voice to common sense. Indeed, buried underneath his criticism of the Merovingian kings rests the material necessary to reconstruct alternative points of view.

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83 See Sylvie Joye, 'L'image d'Amalasonthe chez Procope de Césarée et Grégoire de Tours: portraits contrastés entre Orient et Occident', *Le Moyen Âge*, 111 (2005), 229–57.

84 On the genealogy of Eutharic and its place in Ostrogothic politics, see Peter Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun Domination', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 79 (1989), 103–28.

85 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX. vii. 29.

86 On the ubiquity of such criteria in classical antiquity, see Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 85–119.

CHAPTER 5

Merovingian Marital Practice

> There is grief and sorrow of the heart when a wife envies a rival woman, and her tongue is a scourge that makes it known to all.
>
> SIRACH 26:6

Introduction

When it came to marriage and sexual relationships, though Gregory did not care to admit it, most Merovingian kings knew what they were doing. So, too, did their wives and concubines. With Gregory's thematic treatment of brides, worthy and unworthy, established in the preceding chapter, we can now discuss the actions of the Merovingians on their own terms. First we will challenge the hypothesis that Merovingian kings practiced polygamy (or more specifically, polygyny)—a theory built upon an overly credulous approach to the stories in Book IV of the *Histories*. Certainly, the Merovingians fell short of Gregory's monogamous ideal, marrying several wives over the course of their lifetimes and keeping concubines as well. But they did so as part of a coherent, reasoned policy that used the exclusivity associated with the status of 'wife' to define the position of the 'queen'. With some justification, Gregory criticised the Merovingians' approach for leading to political instability and civil war, but he took his critique to excess, and it is doubtful that his alternative—uncompromising monogamy—stood a chance at improving matters. We should remember: when Gregory became bishop, the Merovingian family had ruled for a century; after he died, they ruled for another century and a half. Clearly, the family was successful in securing and perpetuating its position atop Gallic society. A complex marital policy was key to this success. The Merovingians needed to produce a sufficient number of heirs, to secure marital alliances, to arrange succession, and to convey a sense of legitimacy to their rule, yet without sacrificing the flexibility needed to adapt to changing political circumstance. With this system understood, we can better analyse not only these royal marriages and their chronology but also the motives of those involved: kings, wives, and concubines alike.

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An Unhelpful Hypothesis: Merovingian Polygyny

Gregory's description of the many 'wives' of particular kings has given rise to the hypothesis, which has never been universally accepted in scholarship but has continued to linger without sufficient scrutiny, that the Merovingians practiced polygyny and that they did so as the inheritors of an elite institution that dated back to ancient 'Germanic' society.[1] Although the scholarly literature that references 'Merovingian polygyny' usually does so offhand, the hypothesis received a more detailed treatment by Suzanne Wemple, who wrote:

> The combination of the Germanic polygyny and the Roman institution of concubinage gave almost complete license to men to be promiscuous, furthered male dominance, and accentuated sexual double standards in Merovingian society. As long as there were no strict requirements for the legalization of unions and the legitimization of children, polygyny continued unabated in the royal family. Four Merovingian kings, Clothar I, Charibert I, Chilperic I, and Dagobert I, are known to have indulged in this.[2]

Wemple's argument depended on her assumption that polygyny continued, as a social institution, from 'Germanic' antiquity into the Merovingian period. In the years since Wemple wrote, the case for such a 'Germanic' precedent has been undermined by a reappraisal of the source on which it was based: one passage from the *Germania* of the second-century Roman aristocrat, Tacitus. After describing the attire of women in Germania, which he considered revealing since it exposed the arms, shoulders, and uppermost part of the chest, Tacitus remarked:

> Nevertheless, matrimony is strict—and no custom is allotted a greater amount of esteem. For they are nearly alone among the barbarians in remaining content with a single wife, except for a very few who enter into many marriages—not out of lust, but because of their nobility.[3]

1 See, for example, Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern Bullough and James Brandage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 123–52 (pp. 129–30); Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Long-Haired Kings', pp. 161 and 204; Affeldt and Reiter, 'Die *Historiae* Gregors von Tours', p. 200; and Geary, *Before France and Germany*, p. 52.

2 Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 38–41 (quotation from p. 38).

3 Tacitus, *Germania*, 18; cf. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp. 10–15.

Tacitus's observations must be regarded as of limited value, as he never went to Germania himself and thus did not personally witness these practices.[4] He wrote, first and foremost, to critique his own Roman society. Moreover, the wide gap between the elite of second-century Germania and the Merovingians of sixth-century Gaul calls into question any attempt to link the practices of the kings named by Wemple to customs drawn from 'Germanic' antiquity.

Even with this connection in doubt, however, Wemple's more specific claim that Chlothar, Charibert, Chilperic, and Dagobert practiced polygyny has endured without comprehensive critique. In part this has been due to a lack of alternative, credible interpretations of the available evidence, most of which derives from Book IV of the *Histories*. Eugen Ewig's attempt to reconstruct the chronology of Chlothar's marriages is case in point. Ewig assumed that 1) Chlothar practised serial monogamy, 2) the children of his wives had all been born in wedlock (rather than before marriage), and 3) the chronological details provided by Gregory were basically accurate. As a result, he concluded that Chlothar was married to Ingund from c. 517 to 523, then to Guntheuca until c. 530, then Ingund again until he married Aregund no later than 536; by 540 Chlothar had replaced Aregund with Chunsina and at some point after this he married Radegund until, in the early 550s, he briefly married Wuldetrada; he may or may not have had his putative son Gundovald thereafter from another woman.[5] Susanne Wemple pointed to this convoluted timeline to support her own view, as it was much simpler to assume that Chlothar had been married to some of these women at the same time.[6] While they may have arrived at different conclusions, both Ewig and Wemple drew upon Gregory's information without sufficiently analysing its literary context—his critique of royal marital policy, which we surveyed in Chapter 4. Gregory provided vague, imprecise, or inaccurate information, and this must be identified in order to produce a simpler reconstruction of Chlothar's marriages, one that involves neither a tangle of serial brides nor polygyny.

Gregory's claim, for example, that Chlothar had been married to Ingund and Aregund derives from his fanciful story about the 'exceedingly lustful'

4 Steven Fanning, 'Tacitus, Beowulf, and the *Comitatus*', *Haskins Society Journal*, 9 (1997), 17–38 (pp. 33–35). More generally, see Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: Norton, 2011). On the problems with the use of the term 'Germanic' beyond linguistic analysis, see the discussion of ethnic terminology in the Introduction, pp. 7–9, and also Walter Goffart, 'The Theme of "The Barbarian Invasions" in Late Antiquity and Modern Historiography', repr. in Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 111–32, especially p. 112.

5 Ewig, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', pp. 29–36.

6 Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 38.

(*nimium luxoriosus*) king who 'married his own wife's sister' ([…] *uxoris suae sororem acciperet*) because she had asked him to find the best of husbands for her sibling.[7] Gregory was never clear about when exactly Chlothar elevated either of these sisters to the status of wife, or, indeed, about how long they lived.[8] (Ewig's suggested dates were derived largely by working backward from the ages of the children, together with his second assumption.) Indeed, it is possible the lowborn sisters were never more than concubines to the king but that they became 'wives' through Gregory's pen, as the humorous turn of his tale required. Additionally, the fact that only Chlothar's sons from Ingund and Aregund survived to inherit a share of the kingdom may also have contributed to the way in which the sisters were remembered in subsequent years, as their sons likely wished to be thought of as the offspring of married wives rather than concubines. (Chlothar also had a son from the concubine Chunsina and possibly another from the unnamed mother of Gundovald, but neither of these sons were successful in carving out a share of the realm.) Gregory's own esteem for Sigibert, son of Ingund, and disdain for Chilperic, son of Aregund, may also have helped to shape his account, in which the former sibling is wronged by her 'husband' and her sister.

None of Chlothar's highborn wives produced any children of record. This is crucial for understanding the sequence of the king's marriages, beginning in 523 with Guntheuca, who appears in only one line of the *Histories* and who, therefore, may have died before she had a chance to produce a son.[9] In 533, Chlothar seized the young Radegund, daughter of the Thuringian king Berthar,

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7 *Historiae*, IV. 3. Gregory thus added Chlothar to a list of other *luxoriosus* individuals: the wicked emperor Nero (*Historiae*, I. 25), the emperor Avitus, deposed for this reason (*Historiae*, II. 11), King Childeric, also deposed for this reason (*Historiae*, II. 12), the *dux* Victorius, stoned for this reason (*Historiae*, II. 20), and a debauched priest, who caused all manner of trouble (VI. 36).

8 Ingund and Aregund were only mentioned in Gregory's *Histories*, but Aregund's grave has been uncovered. The dating of the remains and grave goods is consistent with the chronology presented below: Aregund's age at death (around sixty, in the years 572 to 583) and childbirth (around eighteen, thus in the years 534 to 541). See Patrick Périn, *Pour une révision de la datation de la tombe d'Arégonde, épouse de Clotaire Ier, découverte en 1959 dans la Basilique de Saint-Denis*, Archéologie médiévale, 21 (Paris: CNRS, 1991); and, more recently, Patrick Périn and others, 'La tombe d'Arégonde. Nouvelles analyses en laboratoire du mobilier métallique et des restes organiques de la défunte du sarcophage 49 de la basilique de Saint-Denis', *Antiquités nationales* (2005), 181–206. For a bibliography of earlier studies, see Bailey Young, 'Exemple aristocratique et mode funéraire dans la Gaule mérovingienne', *Annales*, 41 (1986), 379–407 (p. 406, nn. 37–38).

9 *Historiae*, III. 6.

and took her to one of his villas where she was raised by guardians until she reached majority.[10] During this period Chlothar produced sons from the low-born Ingund and Aregund while retaining the option of marrying Radegund, which he later elected to do as his political needs required.[11] After many years without the birth of a child, and perhaps for this reason more than any other, the marriage ended and Radegund took up a life under religious vows (in circumstances discussed in Chapter 3). Then, in the mid-550s, Chlothar considered marrying the princess Wuldetrada but was persuaded against it, according to another of Gregory's derisory stories, because he faced opposition from the episcopate. Contrary to Gregory's claims, therefore, Chlothar chose his sexual relationships according to a coherent policy: he married highborn women when political circumstance required; otherwise, he produced sons from low-born women—concubines—, which afforded him the option of recognising or rejecting such offspring (and their mothers) as necessary.

Gregory himself came close to admitting this in his story of Gundovald's upbringing:[12]

> Gundovald was born in Gaul, raised with great care, educated in letters, and, as is the custom of the kings here, he wore his hair long down his back. He was taken to King Childebert by his mother, who said: 'Look, this is your nephew, the son of King Chlothar—since he is detested by his father, you take him, for he is your flesh and blood.' Childebert took him and kept him by his side, as he had no sons of his own. When Chlothar heard of this, he sent messengers to his brother, saying: 'Give the boy up and send him to me.' Childebert straightaway sent the youth to his brother, who took one look at him and ordered his hair to be shorn, saying: 'This is no son of mine.'[13]

Gregory had little interest in connecting Chlothar's rejection of Gundovald to a larger, rational policy. Similarly, because Gregory wished to present the sexual

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10 *Historiae*, III. 7; Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 2.

11 There is a parallel example from 560 in which a nobleman (*vir nobilis*) seized the highborn (*clarissima*) Rusticula, aged 5, and kept her in his household 'so that he might marry her once she reached legitimate age', but he later decided not to take her as his wife. See *Vita Rusticulae*, 1–3. The 'legitimate age' is not clear, but it presumably related to the onset of puberty. The youngest girl to be married (rather than merely betrothed) that I have found is Eusebia, aged 10 (Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IV. 28).

12 Gundovald's birth has been dated to the mid-540s by Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West', p. 99 and n. 114. As we saw above, Eugen Ewig thought Gundovald was born later.

13 *Historiae*, VI. 24.

practices of Chlothar and kings like him as a shambles, he subordinated terminological precision to his greater purpose of developing this theme, loosely describing concubines as wives as it suited his literary purposes.[14] It is little surprise, therefore, to find that a straightforward acceptance of Gregory's terminological and chronological framework led Ewig to produce his convoluted reconstruction of Chlothar's marriages, or that it led Wemple to conclude that Chlothar had practiced polygyny. In contrast, the critical reappraisal of Gregory's material presented here results in a more plausible interpretation. Over the course of his fifty-year reign (511–61), Chlothar had two wives (Guntheuca in 523 and Radegund in the 540s), one failed attempt to arrange for another (Wuldetrada in the mid-550s) and three or four identifiable concubines (Chunsina, Ingund, Aregund, and possibly the mother of Gundovald), who were perhaps, but not necessarily, kept simultaneously to one another and/or to one of the aforementioned wives, with the years after Guntheuca but before Radegund presenting the most appealing dates.

Although it might be tempting to refer to the possibility of more than one woman at Chlothar's side simultaneously as 'polygyny', even if only one woman was ever his wife,[15] this risks overlooking a distinction that will be crucial for understanding Merovingian marital policy and queenship, as we shall see below. It also comes close to reiterating, in different terms, Gregory's claim that Chlothar took sexual partners in a whimsical, careless, even disorderly manner, without consideration for the political consequences. Gregory may have thought there was little point in distinguishing Chlothar's wives from his concubines, but the king himself and the women involved may well have thought otherwise—a point that can only be pursued once polygyny is removed from consideration. Yet Gregory's depiction of the irresponsible king is not so easily erased, especially since he presented it as a straightforward, common sense critique, embellished though it may have been with amusing anecdotes. Indeed, such is the lure of Gregory's 'exceedingly lustful' Chlothar that Samuel Dill declared: '[Chlothar's] harem was on the scale of Baghdad

14 On the terminological distinction usually made between a 'concubine' (*concubina*) and a wife (*uxor, coniux*) who was taken 'in marriage' (*in coniugio, in matrimonio*), see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'The History of Marriage and the Myth of *Friedelehe*', in *Early Medieval Europe*, 14 (2006), 119–51 (pp. 145–47).

15 See, for example, the analysis found in Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 73; Verdon, 'Les femmes laïques en Gaule', pp. 246–47; and Martina Hartmann, 'Concubina vel regina? Zu einigen Ehefrauen und Konkubinen der karolingischen Könige', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 63 (2007), 545–68 (pp. 555–56).

or Constantinople', while, more recently, Dick Harrison fancied that 'we can easily imagine [Chlothar's] court of the kingdom of Soissons as an archetypal Barbarian harem.'[16] Such orientalist indulgence fails to understand Chlothar's approach to marriage, to sexual relationships, and to the production of heirs; nor does it do justice to the harems of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, for that matter.[17]

Gregory also used imprecise terminology in his account of Chilperic's marriages, which he began by saying that the king, inspired by his brother Sigibert's marriage to the princess Brunhild, had arranged to marry to her sister Galswinth, 'even though he already had several wives' (*cum iam plures haberet uxores*).[18] Of these 'many wives', however, Gregory was able to identify only two: Fredegund, 'whom he had from before' (*quam prius habuerat*), and Audovera, 'his earlier queen' (*priore regina sua*). Gregory's use of such terminology formed part of his larger critique of Chilperic as driven by irrational passions, which includes his claim that the king later murdered Galswinth 'out of yearning for Fredegund' (*per amorem Fredegundis*), even though she had agreed to return to her family and leave her treasure behind. Gregory's portrait of the sexually impassioned Chilperic sits awkwardly with the fact that, after Galswinth's death, the king stayed faithful to Fredegund for the remaining seventeen years of his life (567–84). Furthermore, all of Fredegund's seven children were born after Galswinth's death, while Audovera's five children were likely born before Chilperic's marriage to Galswinth.[19] If not for Gregory's opening words, therefore, one might assume that Chilperic had taken as sexual partners Audovera, then Galswinth, and then Fredegund in sequence. Significantly, Gregory also wrote that, in arranging his marriage to Galswinth, Chilperic 'promised to set the other women aside' (*promittens* [...] *se alias relicturum*), indicating that a princess from a major kingdom was not expected to accept the presence of other women, wives or concubines alike.

Another episode in his *Histories*, this one involving a woman and her two husbands, further demonstrates Gregory's technique of using imprecise terminology to deride those relationships he held in low regard. When King Theudebert marched into the city of Cabrières, he was struck by the beauty

16 Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London: MacMillan, 1926), p. 372; and Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic, 1998), p. 86.

17 On the latter, see Nadia Maria El Cheikh, 'Revisiting the Abbasid Harems', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1 (2005), 1–19.

18 *Historiae*, IV. 28.

19 See Ewig, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', pp. 33–34.

of a *matrona* named Deuteria.[20] Though she had a husband who was away in Béziers, Theudebert 'took her to bed' (*eam copulavit*) anyway, because he was 'seized by a passion for her' (*amore euis capitur*). Gregory then described how Theudebert later married Deuteria (*in matrimonio sociavit*), without mentioning whether or not her first marriage had come to an end.[21] In this way, Gregory enhanced the sordid character of the story, disparaging not only Theudebert but also Deuteria, who was one of the villainesses of the *Histories*. (Elsewhere, Gregory claimed that she had drowned her own daughter out of fear that Theudebert might consider replacing her with a younger version of herself.)[22] It almost goes without saying that no scholar has used Gregory's ambiguity over Deuteria's first marriage to hypothesise the existence of polyandry as an institutionalised practice among the *matronae* of Gaul, yet this is the same sort of argument produced in support of the hypothesis that the Merovingian kings practiced polygyny. One further point: Gregory later wrote that Theudebert had refused to marry the Lombard princess Wisigard, as his father had arranged, because he preferred Deuteria; only after several years and much pressure from his leading men did the king set Deuteria aside (*relicta Deuteria*) and take Wisigard as his bride.[23] Clearly, therefore, Theudebert did not consider it possible to be married to both Wisigard and Deuteria simultaneously, nor did his leading men.[24]

Queenship and Merovingian Marital Customs

The Merovingians may not have practised polygyny, but neither does monogamy suggest itself as a particularly fitting term. Kings kept wives and concubines and dismissed them as required, though they did not always act with a free hand, constrained or compelled as they were by extrinsic circumstance. Just as the Merovingians did not leave their marital policy to lust or whimsy,

20 *Historiae*, III. 22.

21 *Historiae*, III. 23.

22 *Historiae*, III. 26.

23 *Historiae*, III. 20, III. 23, III. 27.

24 Wemple's other example, Dagobert I, derives from material in Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 53, IV. 58, and IV. 59, in which the chronology of the king's marriages to Nantechild, Wulfegund, and Berchild is less than clear, together with the statement in IV. 60: '*Nomina concubinarum, eo quod plures fuissent, increuit huius chronice inseri*'. Considering that Dagobert I was the *bête noir* of the *Chronicae*, and that Fredegar possibly took inspiration from Gregory's literary techniques, it seems unwise to give too much weight to this sole remaining example.

neither did they adopt a system too rigid to accommodate their changing political needs, as Gregory's strictly monogamous ideal surely constituted. In light of this complexity, it is best to focus on the title of 'queen' (*regina*): its benefits, exclusivity, and the manner in which it was entwined with the status of wife. This has the potential to indicate the social system standing behind the marital practices of Merovingian kings, which framed the debate Gregory himself engaged in within the *Histories*. We might also understand the actions and motives of the women involved: why some concubines had aspirations to become queen while others were content to remain in the background, why some wives faded from the scene after their husbands died while others remained prominent at court, and why some women acquired tremendous financial resources while others did not.

The rank of queen conferred distinct privileges, and for this reason it remained an object of aspiration, fought for and jealously guarded. Many of the conflicts Gregory recounted between the king's current wife, former wives, and/or concubines involved a queen using the resources that only she enjoyed to undermine potential rivals. This is apparent, for example, in Gregory's account of Chilperic's relationships previously discussed: the arrival of the princess Galswinth pushed Audovera out, and she became a 'former queen' (here Gregory's linguistic precision in describing queenship contrasts his slip-shod reference to the king's 'many wives'), while the murder of Galswinth in turn created the opportunity for Fredegund to become queen; Fredegund then made sure Audovera stayed far removed from the Neustrian court, eventually managing to have her put to death.[25] As we have seen, many queens also sought to retain their rank and position after the death of the king by attempting to marry his successor: Guntheuca sought to marry Chlothar after Chlodomer's death, Wuldetrada to marry Chlothar after Theudebald's death, Theudogild to marry Guntram after Charibert's death, and Brunhild to marry Merovech after Sigibert's death.[26] Others sought to prolong their influence beyond their husband's lifetime through guardianship of their young sons, protecting their position as dowager queen with equal vigilance. Brunhild, for example, sought to prevent her son from marrying the noblewoman Theudelinda, and

25 *Historiae*, IV. 28 and V. 2.

26 *Historiae*, III. 6 (Guntheuca), IV. 9 (Wuldetrada), IV. 26 (Theudogild), and V. 2 (Brunhild). The first three of these examples are discussed above and in Chapter 4, pp. 90–92. Brunhild's marriage to Merovech is discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 145–49. There is also the example of Goiswinth in the Visigothic kingdom, who married Athanagild and then Leovigild, discussed in Chapter 1, p. 27.

her grandson from marrying the Visigothic princess Ermenberga, because she feared these women might rival her own position at court.[27]

Although the evidence is fragmentary, at times it is possible to glimpse queens commanding resources on a vast scale. Radegund, for example, distributed so much money in donations and almsgiving while queen that she must have had access to the royal treasury or sources of income associated with the state.[28] In another example, when Chilperic sent his daughter Rigunth off to the Visigothic kingdom to be married, Fredegund gave the girl so much gold, silver, and clothing that he began to fear he might be left bankrupt.[29] Chilperic's leading men were also uncomfortable with the queen's seemingly unfettered access to royal funds, but she rebuked them by asserting that the gifts had come solely from her own property (*de mea proprietate*), which included the assets she had accumulated (*de proprio congregavi*), the gifts she had received from leading men (*de domibus mihi concessis*), and the tax revenues she had collected (*de fructibus quam tributis plurima reparavi*). Elsewhere, Gregory referenced tax registers for certain cities that were Fredegund's to collect or destroy as she saw fit.[30] Galswinth had also received revenues from five cities: Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Lescar, and Cieutat, which she acquired upon her marriage to Chilperic.[31] After her death, this wedding gift (*morgengabe*) was considered to be part of her estate, and it was eventually inherited by her sister, Brunhild. Whether or not these examples were exceptional, and they may not have been, it is clear that a system existed for managing and distributing assets to the queen, exclusive to her, which she acquired upon her marriage to the king.

Among the privileges exclusive to the queen one cannot rank the right of her sons to acquire a share of the kingdom, as the Merovingians sometimes divided up the realm between the sons of more than one woman—though curiously never more than two. Thus, Clovis's son Theuderic I, from an unnamed concubine, and his sons from Queen Chlothild inherited a share of the kingdom, as did Chlothar I's sons from Ingund and Aregund, and Dagobert I's sons from Nantechild and Ragnetrude (the latter example occurring after Gregory's lifetime). Nevertheless, even here the queen held a clear advantage.

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27 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 30 and IV. 34. Brunhild, it seems, did not stand in the way of her son Childebert II's relationship with Faileuba, perhaps suggesting the latter was of low birth.

28 See Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 3, 9, 13, and 14.

29 *Historiae*, VI. 45.

30 *Historiae*, V. 34.

31 *Historiae*, IX. 20.

Wealth, influence, and political support put her in a superior position to secure the throne for her sons and exclude others. Moreover, the few instances in which the kingdom was shared between rival offspring may well represent irregularities,[32] with the accession to the throne of a single woman's children being the expected, preferred practice. Clovis's son Theuderic I, for example, may only have acquired his share of the kingdom because he was already an adult when his father died, while Chlothild's sons were still quite young. Likewise, although Chlothar's sons from both Ingund and Aregund acquired a share of the kingdom, his sons from other women were excluded (Gundovald and Chramn, for example), as we have seen.[33] Furthermore, Sagittarius, bishop of Gap, questioned the ability of Austrechild's sons to sit on the throne (as discussed in Chapter 4), which demonstrates that the legitimacy of children born from a king's concubines might not be accepted by everyone.[34] Similarly, when Theuderic II asked Desiderius, bishop of Vienne, whether or not he should marry his concubine, the bishop told him: 'it is better to take a wife and make your sons legitimate' (*bonum est uxorem accipere atque* [...] *legitimos filios procedere*).[35] Thus, while the issue of succession was too important to be determined solely by social conventions, the privileges enjoyed by the queen were nonetheless a decisive advantage: her sons were certainly heirs to the throne and in most circumstances they were probably expected to enjoy this privilege exclusively.

Unlike later Carolingian practice, Merovingian queens were not anointed in a public ceremony.[36] The absence of such a ritual, however, does not mean that queenship lacked a hallmark. Indeed, the congruence of queenship with marital status meant that no ritual was required beyond those already associated with marriage.[37] Yitzhak Hen has demonstrated that marriage in sixth-century Gaul was likely accompanied by liturgical ceremonies led by a

32 For the division of the Merovingian realm as a result of immediate circumstance rather than longstanding custom, see Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions'.

33 Rauching also claimed to be one such son later in life (*Historiae*, IX. 9).

34 *Historiae*, V. 20.

35 *Vita Desiderii episcopi Viennensis*, 8, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. III (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 620–48 (pp. 640–41).

36 For Carolingian practice, see Janet Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', repr. in Janet Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 283–307; and Janet Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual', repr. in Janet Nelson, *The Frankish World, 750–900* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 99–131.

37 On this see also Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 129.

priest or bishop, in a church, before an altar (at least within the upper ranks of society).[38] Marriage was also signified by the exchange of gifts from a husband to his bride, a tradition that dated to Roman times.[39] Both the *Lex Salica*, a contemporary legal text, and the *Lex Ripuaria*, later in date but codifying older practices, assumed that a husband gave his bride a financial sum, referred to as a *dos*, as a condition of marriage, and that this was standard practice.[40] Thus, for a Merovingian king, the marital liturgy and the *dos* signified that a woman was both his wife and queen, distinct from his concubines. This also incorporated Christian notions of marital exclusivity into Merovingian practice. But marital exclusivity was not the same as sexual exclusivity, and to understand the legitimacy of concubinage we must turn to another Roman tradition: the custom of maintaining a sexual relationship with one's household slaves. Largely accepted among the elite since antiquity, this practice continued straight through the Merovingian period and into Carolingian times, though

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38 Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 131–37. There is one clear example of this mentioned in *Historiae*, v. 2 and v. 18, where Gregory stated that Praetextatus, Bishop of Rouen, had presided over the marriage between Merovech and Brunhild. See also Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), especially pp. 362–85; and Sylvie Joye, *La femme ravie: le mariage par rapt dans les sociétés occidentales du haut Moyen Âge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

39 See Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity*, pp. 52–62; and Paul Mikat, *Dotiert Ehe—Rechte Ehe* (Opladen: Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), pp. 34–37. Merovingian legal texts envisioned only one normative form of marriage, in which the transfer of the *dos* was customary but might be absent due to exceptional circumstances (see below).

40 Because the *Lex Ripuaria* also referred to marriages without a *dos*, scholarship formerly took this to imply the existence of a second form of marriage, termed *Friedelehe*, and it was argued that the women described as 'concubines' in the sources were actually wives married according to this alternate custom. See, for example, Herbert Meyer, 'Friedelehe und Mutterrecht', *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte – Germanische Abteilung*, 47 (1927), 198–286. There is no need to repeat here the conclusive arguments against this hypothesis formulated in more recent years, which have demonstrated that *Friedelehe* was a scholarly construct, inspired by nationalistic pride. For this critique, see Andrea Esmyol, *Geliebte oder Ehefrau? Konkubinen im frühen Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002); Mazo Karras, 'The History of Marriage and the Myth of *Friedelehe*'; Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 122–37; and Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 101–17.

it was not without its moral critics.[41] A free man had the option to marry his unfree concubine, manumitting her in the process. As we saw in Chapter 4, many Merovingian kings married girls of low birth, and so we must assume that these women were often former concubines. As we shall see, this afforded a king the flexibility to produce potential heirs first and select a queen later, without sacrificing the sense of legitimacy that marriage conferred to a woman and her children. It also meant that a household slave might rise to the rank of queen and see her son inherit the throne. Little wonder that Gregory, as a bishop invested in sexual probity and as an aristocrat invested in social hierarchy, found the whole system particularly distasteful.

The Rationale for Royal Marital Practices

Clearly, a coherent rationale lay behind the marital practices of Merovingian kings. Even Gregory's most criticised examples—Chlothar, Charibert, Guntram, and Chilperic—operated under constraints. They were not so free, nor so foolish, as to do as their whimsy or lust demanded. Rather, the freedom they enjoyed derived from the flexibility of existing social customs, which they cleverly used to their advantage. Gregory may have thought such an approach was full of moral contradiction, but his view was not shared by everyone, for these kings were never without their supporters, bishops included. Moreover, Gregory's preference for uncompromising monogamy had distinct disadvantages, even if he supported it with numerous examples. A highborn bride was in a position to insist on the dismissal of all other women from the king's side as a condition of marriage, yet she might prove unable to conceive. Nor was she (or her sons) as easily dispensable as a concubine, should political necessity require it. Thus, Gregory may have upheld the marriages of Clovis and Sigibert to highborn women as examples of wise policy conducted by confident rulers, but in truth they had probably been arranged in moments of insecurity to obtain the political connections and wealth that these brides offered. Indeed, a contradiction lay beneath Gregory point that, on the one hand, a king should take only one sexual partner, selected for her virtues, and, on the other hand, that succession was too important to leave to chance. Always a master of his narrative, Gregory resolved this problem by asserting that the birth of sons

41 See Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 183–84; and Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, pp. 38–40.

was ultimately the purview of God, who was sure to reward those who obeyed his commands and to punish those who disobeyed. For example, Guntram had been left without a surviving son even though he had never lacked a fecund partner, exactly because jealousy arose among his many women—intrafamilial bloodletting ensued, and his last remaining son was struck down 'by the judgement of God' (*iudicio Dei*).[42]

We should point out that fertility is conspicuously absent from Gregory's list of criteria for a suitable royal bride (which, as we detailed in Chapter 4, included pedigree, intellect, grace, modesty, piety, and wealth). Indeed, many of his suitably chosen brides failed to produces sons (Radegund, Galswinth, and Ingoberg), while many of his 'unworthy' examples succeeded in doing so (Aregund, Veneranda, Marcatrude, Austrechild, Theudogild, Chunsina, Audovera, and Fredegund). Because Gregory blamed the political troubles of his day on kings who produced too many sons from too many women, it must be emphasised that several kings in sixth-century Gaul risked dying without leaving a single male to inherit the kingdom. Indeed, civil war might just as easily result from a paucity of heirs as from an abundance. Guntram, Childebert I, Theudebald, and Charibert all perished without an heir, while Sigibert and Chilperic were each survived by only one very young son. Chilperic, in fact, had found himself sonless at key moments during his reign even though he produced nine sons in total throughout the course of his life. We should also note that Chlothar gradually acquired control of the whole of the Merovingian realm by expanding his dominion each time one of his brothers or nephews died without leaving an heir. From the perspective of most kings, therefore, the stability of the realm might be better facilitated by producing many sons and sorting out the status of favoured heirs and their mothers later. Indeed, this need not require a king to take a great many sexual partners, only that the first be a concubine rather than a wife.

By marring from among their unfree servants, the Merovingian kings were also able to present themselves as a peerless elite, unburdened by the concerns that weighed upon those of the aristocracy who might have kept concubines but who sought to perpetuate or enhance their social standing by marrying women of means.[43] Lowborn women also stood outside established political

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42 For the death of Guntram's sons as divine punishment, see *Historiae*, IV. 25 and V. 20. Gregory's statement that Guntram had been left *absque liberis* (*Historiae*, V. 17) must be taken to mean 'sonless', as the king had at least one daughter who lived into adulthood (*Historiae*, IX. 20).

43 Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 38.

factions, so selecting a wife from their ranks avoided favouritism.[44] They may have come without allies or wealth, but they also came without enemies. Indeed, even when kings married highborn women they preferred foreign princesses to the daughters of their own noblemen, as these royal brides were removed from local political networks.[45] Merovingian power was most on display when kings were able to dismiss highborn wives in favour of a new bride taken from the lower ranks of society. Thus, Guntram dismissed Marcatrude and married her father's slave, while Charibert dismissed Ingoberg and married her own slave. Not that such dismissals were without consequence: Guntram, for example, incurred the anger of Marcatrude's family and the criticism of Bishop Sagittarius, as we saw in Chapter 4. Similarly, a rumour circulated that Chilperic had decided to murder Galswinth in secret rather than return her to her family—a rumour Gregory happily etched into his *Histories*. Although it is unclear what precisely such a 'dismissal' involved (Gregory's word is *relinquere*), divorce was established in the Roman legal tradition, and it is apparent that a 'relinquished' wife lost most of the resources formerly available to her, including wealth, influence, and prestige—not necessarily all of what she once enjoyed, but enough to significantly reduce her standing.[46]

Not every king took this approach to marriage, of course. Gregory's exemplar, Sigibert, married only once and kept no concubines, as is clear not only from the *Histories* but also from Venantius Fortunatus, who praised the king for his fidelity to Brunhild and for his chastity before their marriage.[47] There may have been others like Sigibert, even if they are difficult to spot. Because Gregory usually mentioned concubines only when recounting the parentage of their offspring or when criticising a particular king, the absence of any reference to a concubine cannot be taken to indicate that none were present at a king's side. Nevertheless, there are some likely candidates. Childebert I reigned for forty-seven years (511–58), but he is known to have married only one woman, Ultrogotha, and to have had only two children, both daughters, from her alone

44 Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', pp. 168–69.

45 See Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 41–43. Possible exceptions include Guntram's wife Marcatrude, Chramn's wife Chalda, and Theudebert I's wife Deuteria, as discussed in Chapter 4, p. 97.

46 See Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity*, pp. 177–89; Judith Evans-Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 242–53; and Ingrid Heidrich, 'Besitz und Besitzverfügung verheirateter und verwitweter freier Frauen im merowingischen Frankenreich', in *Weibliche Lebensgestaltung im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Hans-Werner Goetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), pp. 119–38.

47 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI. 1, lines 35–36.

(Chrodoswintha and Chrodoberga). As we have seen, Childebert initially took the young Gundovald into his household 'because he had no sons of his own' (*quod ei fili non essent*). When he died in 558, his brother Chlothar seize his kingdom and treasury, and sent his wife Ultrogotha and her daughters into exile. Perhaps for this reason, Gregory chose not to hold Childebert up as an example of his recommended approach to marital policy, even if he fulfilled the requirements.[48]

The flexible approach most Merovingian kings took to arranging marriages led to dramatic examples of women rising through the ranks of society. Thus Ingund went from a slave of the royal household to become the mother of three Merovingian kings. Aregund and Austrechild, who also became the mothers of royal heirs, began even more removed from the circles of power: as slaves *outside* the royal household. Others upgraded the relatively high status they already enjoyed: the *matrona* Deuteria, for example, exchanged her first spouse, a nobleman, for the Merovingian king Theudebert. Some women were able to use the influence, wealth, and connections they acquired as queen to remain politically relevant after the deaths of their husbands, either by arranging a marriage to another king (Guntheuca, Brunhild, Wuldetrada, and Theudogild, to varying degrees of success) or by acting as the mother and guardian of the heir to the throne (Brunhild and Fredegund, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 7). These women actively pursued the rank of queen and benefited from the exclusive privileges associated with the position. In other words, women were important agents in shaping the social structures through which they pursued their goals and in constructing the rationale that underpinned Merovingian marital policy, even if authority and political agency were generally seen as male prerogatives.

Conclusion

Gregory argued that most Merovingian kings exercised poor judgement in the women they chose to keep at their sides, and he was especially critical of marriage to lowborn women. As we saw in Chapter 4, his stories were intended to shock and amuse his audience: Chlothar and Charibert had both married two sisters; Guntram was left sonless because of the jealousy of his women; Charibert had no surviving sons and he died an excommunicate because of his pursuit of the wrong women; Chilperic murdered one wife for the sake of another, who then had his children from a prior wife killed along with their

48 *Historiae*, IV. 20.

mother. Gregory told these stories without chronological or terminological precision: it is not always clear from the *Histories* when these relationships were formed or whether the women were taken as wives or concubines. His critique aside, however, it is clear that the Merovingian kings of his day approached marriage, sexual relationships, and the production of offspring rather more sensibly. Indeed, whimsy was not a luxury they could afford, even if they projected their power by acting as if they were beyond the rules of elite society. Most kings delicately manoeuvred the intersection between marital customs and the tradition of concubinage to consolidate political power. This approach introduced flexibility into a system that might otherwise have struggled to secure succession or to adapt to changing political circumstances, but it also left kings open to criticism from moral authorities like Gregory of Tours. The throne was not always comfortable, yet a member of the Merovingian family sat in it for three hundred years, due in large part to a complex marital policy formed by the agency of kings, wives, and concubines alike.

CHAPTER 6

Brunhild and Fredegund, I: Moral Opposites or Kindred Spirits?

Introduction

In 588, Gregory and a colleague named Felix travelled to Chalon-sur-Saône for an important meeting with Guntram, king of Burgundy.[1] They brought a treaty from the king of Austrasia, Childebert II, that offered to renew the alliance between the two kingdoms. After some skilful diplomacy on Gregory's part, Guntram agreed, but he worried about the meddling of two powerful women: Childebert's mother, Brunhild, and her longstanding rival in Neustria, Fredegund. Without warning, Guntram turned to Felix and raised the issue accusingly:

> 'Tell me, Felix, is it true that you have established a friendly accord between my sister Brunhild and Fredegund, that enemy of God and man?'
>
> Felix denied the charge, and I spoke up: 'Let the king not doubt that the same "accord" which has bound these two women for so many years still remains—you can be certain the hatred that has long existed between them has not withered but grows anew. If only you, most glorious king, were not so close to her! We are aware that you have often received her emissaries with greater honour than ours.'
>
> The king replied: 'Know, bishop of God, that I receive her emissaries in a manner that never displaces my esteem for my nephew, King Childebert. How could I enjoin friendship with a woman who has so often sent her men to take my life?'

With this said, the negotiations swiftly moved on to other matters. Gregory had made his point to Guntram, and to his audience: could anyone establish friendship with this enemy of God a man?[2]

1 *Historiae*, IX. 20. Gregory referred to 'bishop Felix' without further specification, but he was probably bishop of Bellay.

2 On the use of *amicitia*, 'friendship', to signify a political alliance, see Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, pp. 24–28; and Wolfgang Fritze, 'Die fränkische Schwurfreundschaft der Merowingerzeit: Ihr

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In the *Histories*, Brunhild and Fredegund appear as political adversaries and moral opposites. Gregory encouraged his audience to compare the two queens by emphasising their differences. He said nothing bad of Brunhild, yet he accused Fredegund of a great many crimes, including murder, sacrilege, witchcraft, and treason. So skilful is Gregory's presentation that it conceals the remarkable similarities between the two women, who both enjoyed prominence in the Merovingian kingdoms as wives of a reigning king and then as mothers of the next. As we shall see, others writers had different interpretations. A decade and a half after Gregory's death, Brunhild fell from power. Accused of every regicide of her lifetime, she met a gruesome end. As the *Chronicles* of Fredegar eagerly recounted, her hair, one arm, and one foot were tied to a horse's tail, and she was dragged until her limbs tore from her body.[3] Indeed, by the seventh century, Brunhild had acquired the reputation of a villainess—no better than the wicked Fredegund of the *Histories*. Scholarship has preferred Gregory's sympathetic presentation of the queen to this later tradition. As we shall see in Chapter 7, however, Gregory had a close relationship with Brunhild and he was thus in no position to recount her faults.[4] Kind to Brunhild though Gregory was, he had few express compliments or flattering stories to tell of her, perhaps because he lacked the material. He hoped, instead, that a comparison to Fredegund might show Brunhild to be the more preferable—a benign influence on the realm. Through this approach, Gregory justified his political connections to Brunhild and explained his own personal conflict with Fredegund (also discussed in Chapter 7). It is only with the

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Wesen und ihre politische Funktion', *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte – Germanische Abteilung*, 71 (1954), 74–125 (pp. 94–105).

3 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 42.

4 Scholarship has generally shown greater interest in Brunhild than Fredegund. On the former queen, see the studies of Emma Jane Thomas, 'The "Second Jezebel": Representations of the Sixth-Century Queen Brunhild' (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Glasgow, 2012); Bruno Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut* (Paris: Fayard, 2008); Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Die fränkische Königin Brunhild. Eine biographische Annäherung', in *Scripturus vitam: Lateinische Biographie von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. by Dorthea Walz (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2002), pp. 295–308; Roger–Xavier Lanteri, *Brunehilde: la première reine de la France* (Paris: Perrin, 1995); Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 126–36, 170–74; Janet Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', repr. in Janet, Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 1–48; Michel Rouche, 'Brunehaut: Romaine ou Wisigothe', in *Los Visigodos: Historia y Civilización. Actas de la semana internacional de estudios Visigóticos* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1986), pp. 103–14; and Godefroid Kurth, 'La reine Brunehaut', in *Études franques*, 2 vols (Paris: Champion; and Brussels: Dewitt, 1919), vol. I, pp. 265–356.

literary function of the two queens in the *Histories* understood that we can make insights into their careers and standing in Gaul.

Introducing the Queens

As we have seen in Chapter 4, Gregory introduced Brunhild and Fredegund in tandem in Book IV, describing their marriages to Sigibert and Chilperic.[5] The charming, refined, and intelligent Brunhild arrived with a sizable treasure and, better still, converted to Catholicism. No where was Gregory more complimentary about the queen than here, prior to her close involvement in Merovingian politics. Fredegund, conversely, led Chilperic astray, inspiring him to murder his wife Galswinth so that he could marry her instead. Gregory implied that Chilperic had murdered a saint, since he immediately mentioned a miracle that occurred at Galswinth's tomb. A strikingly different view appears in the *Chronicles* of Fredegar, which used the *Histories* as a source of information on these marriages.[6] Fredegar omitted Brunhild's lovely qualities and her conversion to Catholicism, leaving his audience to believe that she had remained an Arian heretic. Fredegar also left out Galswinth's posthumous miracle, and he interrupted Gregory's narrative structure, which juxtaposed the marriages of Sigibert and Chilperic, by inserting a lengthy passage on the appointment of Gogo to the office of *maior domus*.[7] Fredegar linked this digression to Brunhild by claiming she had convinced her husband to execute Gogo without cause. (In truth, Gogo outlived Sigibert by several years.)[8] Fredegar then finished his portrait with a bold stroke:

> Brunhild's influence caused so much evil and bloodshed in Francia that the prophecy of the Sibyl was fulfilled, who had said: 'Bruna is coming from the regions of Hispania; many nations will perish before her gaze, and she will be crushed by the hooves of horses.'[9]

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5 *Historiae*, IV. 27 and IV. 28.

6 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 57.

7 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 58–59.

8 *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 13, 16, 22, 48; and *Historiae*, VI. 1. This is true even if the author of epistola 48 was another man also named Gogo, as suggested by Franz Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, 5 vols (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1924–65), vol. I, p. 10, n. 76.

9 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 59. This reading extends the quotation a sentence further than Krusch's edition.

Earlier, Fredegar had explained that Brunhild's original name was Bruna, with '-hild' a latter addition.[10] This prophecy, which does not appear in any of the extent collections of the sibylline prophecies, foreshadows Fredegar's dramatic description of the queen's death later in his *Chronicles*.[11] Fredegar clearly understood Gregory's literary strategies, which associated Brunhild with her pious sister Galswinth and juxtaposed the duo with the wicked Fredegund, and he intentionally subverted them by rearranging, supplementing, and redacting his source.

Brunhild, Fredegund, and the Treatment of Bishops

Fredegund lacked any respect for the spiritual authority of the episcopate: she harassed bishops as she saw fit, and those who opposed her received nothing but contempt, mistreatment, or even an assassin's dagger. Once such bishop was Gregory's friend, Praetextatus of Rouen, who was put on trial by Chilperic and Fredegund for his alleged role in supporting the unsuccessful rebellion of Merovech, the king's son from Audovera. Fredegund wished to eliminate this rival branch of the royal family and to punish its supporters. As we shall see, Gregory tried and failed to prevent Praetextatus's conviction, exile, and ultimately his assassination, arranged in secret by the wicked queen. The problems for Praetextatus had first begun when Merovech, his godson, had arrived in Rouen with an army—a suspicious act, since Chilperic had ordered the army to march on Poitiers instead and since Rouen was then home to Audovera and to Chilperic and Fredegund's enduring adversary, the widowed Brunhild.[12] In unclear circumstances, Praetextatus agreed to preside over Merovech's marriage to Brunhild, even though the union violated the canonical prohibition against uniting a man to his uncle's widow.[13] Chilperic and Fredegund naturally understood the marriage to be a threat. In events detailed in Chapter 7, they pursued Merovech until he eventually took his own life, and they had Praetextatus arrested and searched, only to discover that he was in possession of valuables belonging to Brunhild. In the trial that followed (and later in the *Histories*), Gregory defended his colleague, admonishing Chilperic to his

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10 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 57. This claim is dubious. There are only a few examples of royal women with single-element names from the period, and examples are especially lacking from the Merovingian and Visigothic kingdoms.

11 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 42.

12 *Historiae*, V. 2.

13 See De Jong, 'An Unsolved Riddle', p. 108.

face that there were consequences for anyone who persecuted one of God's bishops.[14] Gregory hoped the king might be swayed, but he knew Praetextatus faced an unwavering opponent in Fredegund:

> That same night [in which Gregory admonished Chilperic], after I had finished singing the nocturnal hymns, there was a loud knock at my room's door. My servant told me that messengers from Queen Fredegund were standing outside. Granting them entry, I received salutations from the queen. They then asked me not to oppose her interests and, at the same time, promised me two hundred pounds of silver if Praetextatus were to be brought down though my intervention, adding: 'We have pledges from all of the bishops—do not be the only one to cross us'.[15]

Gregory promised these messengers he would act according to the canons, refusing the bribe but in an impersonal, even cryptic manner. Chilperic opened the next day's proceedings by charging Praetextatus with larceny, which was canonically punishable with expulsion from episcopal office. The king argued that the valuables belonging to Brunhild which had been found in Praetextatus's possession had originally come from his own treasury and had been stolen, which made the bishop an accomplice to the theft. Praetextatus issued a weak defence: at some point in the past Chilperic had agreed to cede ownership of the stolen goods to Brunhild in order to keep the peace with Austrasia. Thus he had merely acted as facilitator for this transfer formerly agreed. It was pointed out to Praetextatus that he had taken fine gold embroidery from among these goods, hacked it into pieces, and divided it among Merovech's supporters—hardly the behaviour of one merely facilitating a transfer of another's valuables. Praetextatus was only able to reply: 'It seemed like it was mine because it belonged to my godson Merovech, whom I had lifted from the font.'[16] Gregory nevertheless wrote that this defence confounded Chilperic, who left 'greatly disturbed and troubled in his conscience'.

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14 Gregory recounted Praetextatus's trial in *Historiae*, V. 18. See also the analysis of Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Femmes royales et violences anti-épiscopales l'époque a mérovingienne: Frédégonde et le meurtre de l'évêque Pretextat', in *Bischofsmord im Mittelalter / Murder of Bishops*, ed. by Natalie Fryde and Dirk Reitz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), pp. 37–50.

15 According to *Historiae*, VII. 16, there were forty-five bishop present.

16 Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 186 suggested that Praetextatus's argument had some merit, given the seriousness with which such spiritual kinship was taken.

The king then confided in his supporters: 'I must admit that I am overcome by the bishop's testimony, and I know what he said is true. What am I to do now, so that the wishes of my queen may be fulfilled?'

Unlike her husband, Fredegund never suffered a troubled conscience. Through her clandestine influence, injustice was certain. Praetextatus was convinced by his episcopal colleagues—those who had taken the queen's money—to admit his guilt, not to larceny but to the more serious charge of conspiracy to kill the king, and plead for mercy, on the guarantee that they would secure leniency from Chilperic on his behalf. The following morning, with everyone assembled in the church of St Peter, Praetextatus threw himself at Chilperic's feet: 'I have sinned before heaven and before you, most merciful king—I am a wicked murderer. For I wished to slay you and place your son on the throne.' The king then knelt before those assembled, imploring them: 'Hear, most pious bishops, that he confesses to this unconscionable crime'. The bishops helped a weeping Chilperic to his feet and led him away. Chilperic then presented them with a book of ecclesiastical regulations 'to which a new quire had been affixed that contained pseudo-apostolic canons with the following instruction: "A bishop guilty of homicide, adultery, or perjury is to be removed from the priesthood." ' Chilperic ordered Praetextatus's clothes to be torn apart and the 'psalm of malediction against [Judas] Iscariot' read over him (Psalm 109, which cursed the liar and the traitor), before imprisoning him and banishing him to an island in the English Channel.

Gregory wrote that he was outraged by this uncanonical punishment, claiming that the 'pseudo-apostolic canons' (*canones quasi apostolicus*) in question had been fabricated. He was wrong. These canons were genuine, the punishment was canonical, and he was bound by his promise to consent to the judgement.[17] Fredegund, it seems, had outwitted even Gregory on this occasion, though he refused to admit it. Unlike Gregory, the *Chronicles* of Fredegar had no trouble professing Praetextatus's guilt: 'Chilperic banished Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen on the grounds that he had plotted against the king according to Brunhild's counsel, which was substantiated by the facts.'[18] The reference to 'Brunhild's counsel' (*consilium Brunechilde*) is a reminder of her deep involvement in these events, which Gregory scarcely touched upon. Indeed, Gregory

17 See n. 1 to Krusch and Levison's *MGH* edition of the *Historiae*, p. 223, referencing canon 25 of the *Canones qui dicuntur apostolorum collectionis Dionysianae*, in *Ecclesiae occidentalis monumenta iuris antiquissima cahonum et conciliorum graecorum interpretationes latinae*, ed. by C. H. Turner, 2 vols in 6 fascicles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1939), vol. I, p. 18.

18 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 78.

mentioned Brunhild only as his story absolutely required, such as in recounting her marriage to Merovech. In contrast, he heaped scorn upon Fredegund at every opportunity, even though she actually had little obvious involvement (setting Gregory's accusations of clandestine activity aside). We should remember Fredegund was, in fact, the most threatened party, facing down the combined efforts of several enemies at once: Brunhild, Merovech, Praetextatus, and likely Audovera as well. Perhaps her desire to oust Praetextatus from his post was not as outrageous or incomprehensible as Gregory insisted.

Following Chilperic's assassination in 584, Praetextatus had an opportunity to return from exile to Rouen, where, as it happened, Fredegund had since taken up residence in the meantime.[19] Against Fredegund's objections, King Guntram reinstated Praetextatus as bishop and ordered her to leave they city and move to Rueil (near Paris).[20] Fredegund refused to accept the decision: with a year, she had return to Rouen and began threatening Praetextatus. The bishop retorted that Fredegund would be 'cast down from the kingdom into the Abyss'. The conflict reached its climate in one of the most memorable passages of the *Histories*:

> The day of the Lord's resurrection came, and the bishop [Praetextatus] hastened early to the church to fulfil his ecclesiastical duties. He began singing the antiphons in their order from the beginning, as custom dictates. When he was halfway through he sat down, and at this moment, while he was resting on his seat, a heartless murderer from among the attendees pulled a knife from his belt and stabbed him under his armpit. Praetextatus cried out for help to the clergy who were present, but of the many who stood nearby not one came to his aid. And yet, with his hands dripping in blood extended above the altar, the bishop gave thanks to God and offered his prayers, before the faithful carried him into his chambers and laid him down on his bed.[21]

As Praetextatus lay dying, Fredegund paid him a visit, cynically vowing to punish the killer and offering the bishop her personal physicians. Praetextatus replied by accusing her of murdering kings (*reges interemit*), shedding the blood of the innocent (*saepius sanguinem innocentem effundit*), and committing many other foul deeds (*mala commisit*). After rejecting her duplicitous offer, Praetextatus rebuked her in biblical language: 'God has decided to call

19 *Historiae*, VII. 16.

20 *Historiae*, VII. 19.

21 *Historiae*, VIII. 31.

me from this world, but you—revealed to be the mastermind of these heinous crimes—shall be accursed in this life, and God shall take vengeance upon your head for my blood.'[22]

Through this vivid story, Gregory proved that Fredegund had no regard for God's bishops or, indeed, for the holy feast of Easter. Yet we should note that some bishops offered support to the queen. Gregory, of course, thought these men had base motivations, and they only appeared in the *Histories* as examples of corruption and hypocrisy. Fredegund's supporter Melanius, for example, became bishop of Rouen upon Praetextatus's exile; he left the city when Praetextatus returned; and he reacquired the post after the latter's murder.[23] Similarly, a letter emerged in which the Visigothic king Leovigild urged Fredegund to prevent Guntram from marching an army into his territories, and to solicit help from Amelius, bishop of Bigorre, if necessary.[24] The letter may have been forged, but it suggests that Bishop Amelius may have been prepared to assist Fredegund in her political manoeuvrings. Another bishop, Aegidius of Reims, was known to be close (*carus*) to the queen, and it was thought he played a role in Merovech's death for this very reason.[25] Lastly, Gregory also mentioned the (bribed) bishops who attended Praetextatus's trial, with particular emphasis on Bertram of Bordeaux and Ragnemod of Paris. Of course, Gregory presented these two as sycophants and implied they had taken the queen's money. But Ragnemod later supported Praetextatus's reinstatement in Rouen, informing Guntram that the bishop had not been excommunicated but only exiled for the sake of penitence, so he was no mere lackey.[26] Bertram, too, acted independently when he supported the usurper Gundovald, against Fredegund's interests.[27] Perhaps these two bishops were simply playing the politician, but an author other than Gregory might have seen their shifting allegiances as the result of principle rather than opportunism, such that they risked their standing with Fredegund to support a fellow bishop's return to his see and a legitimate Merovingian's claim to the throne.

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22 For biblical parallels, see for example Numbers 35:27 and Joshua 20:3–5.

23 *Historiae*, VII. 19 and VIII. 41.

24 *Historiae*, VIII. 28.

25 *Historiae*, V. 18. Aegidius's complex political manoeuvrings are discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 150–52.

26 *Historiae*, VII. 16. On other matters Ragnemod sided with Fredegund, refusing Merovech communion during his rebellion, baptising the queen's son Theuderic, and offering her shelter in the cathedral of Paris following her husband's assassination. See *Historiae*, V. 14, VI. 28, VII. 4.

27 *Historiae*, VII. 31.

In the *Histories*, Brunhild had a very different relationship with the bishops of Gaul. For example, she intervened to end a dispute over episcopal succession in the diocese of Rodez, appointing Innocentius at the expense of his rival, Transobad.[28] Gregory suggested the intervention was well intended, but subsequent events hint that the queen had less noble motives. Once installed, for example, Innocentius began to harass the neighbouring bishop of Cahors about jurisdiction over certain subsidiary churches; since Brunhild claimed Cahors belonged to her, Innocentius may have acted to further her own territorial ambitions.[29] It is also possible that the two had collaborated once before, in a much darker affair. When Innocentius served as *comes* of Javols, before his appointment in Rodez, he came into conflict with the head of a local church named Lupentius—whom he arrested, charged with treason, and sent to Brunhild for judgement.[30] Gregory wrote that Brunhild declared Lupentius innocent and sent him back to Javols, but on the return journey Lupentius was captured by Innocentius, tortured, and killed, with this head placed in a sack and thrown into the Aisne river. Gregory gave no hint that Brunhild had conspired with Innocentius—rather, she had vindicated the innocent Lupentius, a saint whose severed head was discovered by shepherds and venerated as a relic. But others may have been more suspicious. In later years, Brunhild was directly accused of a similar crime: the murder of Desiderius, bishop of Vienne.[31] Though they did not agree in all their details, Sisebut's *Life and Sufferings of the Holy Desiderius*, the anonymous *Sufferings of the Holy Desiderius, Bishop and Martyr*, and the *Chronicles* of Fredegar all held Brunhild responsible for Desiderius's death.[32] Though this event occurred after Gregory's lifetime, it indicates that Brunhild and Fredegund were the subject of similar rumours, faced similar threats, and likely had a more complex relationship with the episcopate than Gregory admitted.

28 *Historiae*, VI. 38.

29 See Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', p. 24. Brunhild eventually acquired control of the city; see *Historiae*, IX. 11.

30 *Historiae*, VII. 37.

31 See Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', pp. 373–75.

32 Sisebut, *Vita vel passio sancti Desiderii*, 15–18, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. III (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 630–37 (pp. 634–36); *Passio sancti Desiderii episcopi et martyris*, 9, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, vol. III (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 638–45 (p. 641); and Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 32.

Treatment of Servants

When Fredegund arranged Praetextatus's murder, she selected one of her slaves to act as the assassin, offering him gold and manumission in return. After the sacrilegious killing was completed, however, and with Praetextatus's nephew insisting upon justice, Fredegund handed the slave over to be tortured and killed.[33] This was just one of several instances in the *Histories* in which Fredegund sent those in her service on assassination missions without concern for the consequences, temporal or eternal.[34] On another occasion, for example, she instructed two clergymen (*clerici*) to disguise themselves as beggars, get close to Brunhild's son, Childebert, and stab him with poisoned daggers. The men hesitated, so Fredegund had them drugged (*medificatus potione direxit*) and sent on their mission anyway. When they failed to return, she sent a slave to investigate; like the clergymen before him, the slave was captured. A terrible fate awaited: 'their hands, ears, and noses were cut off, and they were put to death in various ways.'[35] Yet again, Fredegund sent twelve men to kill Childebert but they too were caught and punished: 'some were confined to a prison, others were release with their hands severed, while some had their noses and ears cut off, so that they would be subjected to jeers and mockery.'[36] Some of these men died from their wounds, while others killed themselves, unable to face the humiliation. Gregory thought these punishments were unpleasant but fair—a just reward for those who wished to kill the king, a mere foretaste of the torments that waited in the afterlife.

Whenever an assassination occurred, Gregory suspected Fredegund, and he accused her without much hesitation or qualification. For example, one night Guntram entered his oratory to find a man armed but asleep in the corner.[37] Under torture, the man confessed that he has been sent to assassinate the king. He also claimed to be working with Fredegund's envoys, who happened to be visiting the king's court at the time. Guntram sent the head of this embassy, Baddo, back to Fredegund in chains, promising to release him if the queen found honourable men to testify to his character and innocence, but she refused.[38] His release was eventually secured by the bishop of Bayeux

33 *Historiae*, VIII. 41.

34 See, for example, *Historiae*, IV. 51, V. 14, V. 18, VII. 7, VII. 20, VIII. 29, X. 18.

35 *Historiae*, VIII. 29.

36 *Historiae*, X. 18.

37 *Historiae*, VIII. 44.

38 *Historiae*, IX. 13.

and other leading officials, without Fredegund's help.[39] In the hands of a different author, Fredegund's refusal to assist Baddo might have signalled her innocence: whether or not the envoys had been in league with the hapless assassin, she had nothing to do with it. But Gregory presented this as further evidence of the queen's cruelty to those in her service, not merely to slaves but also to high ranking officials. Neither did he doubt Fredegund's role in the failed assassination, even though her connection to the events was tenuous and even though the evidence against her had been extracted under torture: 'It is wholly obvious that the envoys had been sent by Fredegund to kill the king through this trickery, but the mercy of the Lord did not allow it.'[40]

Besides Baddo, other high ranking officials suffered Fredegund's cruelty and disrespect. The *dux* Beppolen, for example, 'went over to King Guntram because she [Fredegund] had greatly mistreated him in a manner obviously unbecoming of his rank and station.'[41] Beppolen, at least, saw the writing on the wall and changed his allegiances before it was too late. Others were not so clever: when Fredegund's daughter Rigunth was captured and taken, along with all of the treasure her wedding caravan was carrying, to the usurper Gundovald, it was left to the Neustrian *ex-domesticus* Leunardus to journey to the cathedral of Paris and explain the disaster to the queen:

> When she heard this, she flew into a rage and ordered him to be despoiled right there in the church. After he had been stripped of his garments and the baldric that he had earned in the service of King Chilperic, she ordered him to be taken away from her presence. As for the cooks, bakers, and anyone else known to have returned from this journey, she left them stripped, beaten, and in chains.[42]

Leunardus might have faired better if he had simply abandoned Rigunth and never returned to Neustria, as others had done after her ill-fated journey.[43] Indeed, by describing Leunardus's humiliation in tandem with that of the cooks and bakers, Gregory implied that Fredegund treated him as if he were a common servant. Upon closer examination, however, it seems that the *ex-domesticus* was spared the worst of punishments, presumably in deference to his status. It is hard to see how Fredegund could have acted any

39 The bishop, named Leudovald, was no friend of the queen's; see *Historiae*, VIII. 31.

40 *Historiae*, VIII. 44.

41 *Historiae*, VIII. 42.

42 *Historiae*, VII. 15.

43 See, for example, Gregory's account of Rigunth's journey in *Historiae*, VI. 45 and VII. 9.

differently—her daughter's capture occurred immediately after the assassination of her husband, when she could not afford to appear weak, or to favour mercy over might.[44]

Fredegund the cruel superior, abusive to highborn and lowborn alike, sharply contrasts Gregory's presentation of Brunhild, who defended her servants to a fault. For example, when the *dux* Lupus found himself confronted by his longstanding enemies, Ursio and Berthefred, Brunhild risked her own life to defend him:

> Queen Brunhild realised that Ursio and Berthefred were marching against Lupus with an army, and she became greatly saddened at the thought of her servant enduring an unjust persecution. Covering herself with the courage of a man (*praecingens se viriliter*), she forced her way between the battle lines, saying: 'Stand down, men. You shall do no evil here. Cease your persecution of the innocent. Do not fight a battle over a single person and thereby ruin the prosperity of an entire region.' Hearing these words, Ursio replied: 'Leave us, woman, and be satisfied that you were able to hold sway in this kingdom under your husband. Now it is for your son to rule—his kingdom is not maintained by your protection but by ours. Get back from us, lest we trample you with the hooves of our horses.' The queen and her opponents argued amongst themselves for some time until, by her determined efforts, battle was not joined.[45]

Brunhild's intervention calls to mind Queen Chlothild, who prayed to St Martin on the eve of a battle between her sons, bringing down a hailstorm upon the camps of the opposing armies and thereby abating the conflict.[46] Furthermore, Gregory's use of the word *viriliter*, 'with the courage of a man', to describe Brunhild's bravery mirrors his description of her daughter, Ingund, who had resisted forced conversion to Arianism with such courage,[47] as well as his description of Monegund and her undaunted pursuit of holiness (as we saw in Chapter 2).[48]

Brunhild acted nobly, defending Lupus because he was her *fidelis*, and because the destruction of an entire region was at risk. Gregory knew that Lupus had his faults. He had once unwisely recommended an ambitious and

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44 *Historiae*, VII. 10. See also the discussion of women and violence in Chapter 7, pp. 158–59.

45 *Historiae*, VI. 4.

46 *Historiae*, III. 28.

47 *Historiae*, V. 38.

48 *Vita patrum*, XIX. preface.

well-educated slave named Andarchius to the king; after acquiring wealth, freedom, and distinction, Andarchius proved to be a rotten character who, among other crimes, treated his own slaves so badly that they burned him alive.[49] Lupus also broke a promise to Guntram when he reconciled with the king's enemy, Aegidius of Reims.[50] These were perhaps not the greatest faults—far less, for example, than those of Ursio and Berthefred—but Lupus was no hero of the *Histories*.[51] Neither was Sicharius, whose murder was as unsavoury as it was deserved (stabbed in the head while a guest at dinner by his host), yet Brunhild took offence at his killing all the same, since he 'had pledged himself to her'.[52] Gregory thus carefully presented Brunhild as a patron who supported her clients out of principle rather than personal merit. It was a distinction lost on others, who viewed Brunhild as a bad influence—anything but the peacemaker of the *Histories*. Germanus of Paris, for example, wrote a letter to Brunhild in which he regarded her as a key cause of conflict between her husband and her brother-in-law, urging her to follow the biblical example of Esther and to work to curtail the brewing civil war.[53] Gregory wrote that Germanus had tried to avert the conflict, but he described Sigibert as the recipient of the bishop's admonition rather than Brunhild (in a face-to-face confrontation, rather than via a letter).[54] Another letter, this one written by Bulgar, *comes* of Septimania, described the queen as a 'peddler of strife' (*iurgiorum auctrix*).[55] Likewise, the *Chronicles* of Fredegar and the *Liber historiae Francorum* both blamed Brunhild for another conflict, which occurred later involving her grandsons Theuderic and Theudebert.[56]

Unlike Fredegund, Gregory never described Brunhild as sending someone in her service on an assassination mission. Admittedly, on one occasion King Guntram worried that Brunhild wanted him dead, but Gregory mentioned this only to highlight the king's paranoia, which he hinted at elsewhere in

49 *Historiae*, IV. 46.

50 *Historiae*, IX. 14.

51 *Historiae*, IX. 9 and IX. 12. For a presentation of Lupus as a hero, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII. 7–10.

52 *Historiae*, IX. 19.

53 *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 9.

54 *Historiae*, IV. 51. Both Gregory (*Historiae*, V. preface) and Germanus described greed as the 'root of all evil' in reference to the civil war. Though a well-known biblical phrase (1 Timothy, 6:10), this might suggest that Gregory was familiar with Germanus's letter. See Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V', p. 314.

55 *Epistolae Wisigoticae*, 11.

56 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 27; *Liber historiae Francorum*, 38.

the *Histories*.[57] Other authors showed no such hesitation. The *Chronicles* of Fredegar, for example, accused Brunhild of involvement in the murders of King Chilperic, the *dux* Wintrio, the *patricii* Aegyla and Wulfus, and, as mentioned above, the bishop Desiderius.[58] Fredegar also wrote that Chlothar II sentenced Brunhild to death for murdering no less than ten kings, thus blaming her for nearly every regicide of her lifetime.[59] Likewise, the *Liber historiae Francorum* accused her of poisoning her grandson Theuderic and killing his three young sons.[60]

Treatment of Offspring

Fredegund may have humiliated Leunardus in the cathedral of Paris for his failure to protect her daughter Rigunth, but her fury had nothing to do with a mother's concern. Thus, when Fredegund dispatched the Neustrian *comes stabuli*, Chuppa, to retrieve Rigunth from her captor Gundovald, Gregory made clear the queen's motives were largely political:

> Most people said that Chuppa had been sent there to entice Gundovald—if he still lived—and to bring him to the queen. Because he failed at this, Chuppa brought Rigunth back, disgraced and humiliated though she was.[61]

Indeed, in Gregory's estimation, Fredegund deserved some of the blame for Rigunth's capture in the first place, since she had laden the girl's wedding caravan with so many gifts that it was certain to draw attention: 'Rigunth's mother gave her gifts of gold, silver, and precious clothes so immense that, at the sight of it, the king himself feared he might be left with nothing.'[62] Indeed, for many in Gaul the betrothal proved to be a time of tragedy and sorrow, rather than joy, much to Gregory's dismay:

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57 *Historiae*, VIII. 4. On Guntram's paranoia, see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 178, 208, 225–27.

58 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 93, IV. 18, IV. 21, IV. 29, and IV. 32.

59 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 42.

60 *Liber historiae Francorum*, 39.

61 *Historiae*, VII. 39. Neither was Chuppa the most upright of men to send on such a mission; see *Historiae*, X. 5.

62 *Historiae*, VI. 45.

> [King Chilperic] ordered many domestic servants to be taken from the royal estates and huddled together in waggons. Many cried, wishing not to go; these Chilperic took into custody so that he could more easily send them off with his daughter. Many were so afraid to leave their parents and close relations that it is said they avoided this bitter fate by hanging themselves. Son was torn from father, daughter from mother. They parted with weighty groans and curses such that the lamentations in Paris were comparable to the lamentations of Egypt [during the biblical plagues].[63] Many of those forced to go were of good birth. They drafted their wills, leaving their possessions to churches, ordering the documents to be opened once the princess arrived in Spain and read aloud, as if they were dead and buried.
>
> [...] when the princess left the city gate an axel of her carriage broke, and everyone cried out, 'lo the evil hour', since this was taken to be a sign. After leaving Paris, Rigunth ordered camp to be made eight miles outside the city. That night, fifty men got up and stole off to king Childebert, taking with them one hundred of the best horses, the same number of golden bridles, and two great reins. Along the entire journey, if anyone saw an opportunity he escaped, making away with whatever he could lay his hands on. Meanwhile, vast supplies were collected en route at the expense of various cities, and since the king had not seen fit to provide them from the treasury, everything was taken from the poor.

The tragic end to the journey was, therefore, merely the final chapter in a story that had begun with misery for those under Fredegund and Chilperic's authority and had ended with misery returning to the royal couple. Indeed, Gregory gave the impression that Fredegund was more outraged at the loss of her treasure, her own humiliation, and the political costs of Leunardus's failure, than she was concerned for Rigunth for her own sake. Following the girl's return, little improved:

> Chilperic's daughter Rigunth was always hurling insults at her mother, declaring that she was a highborn lady (*domina*) and that her mother was bound to her in servitude (*servitium*). Such insults were many and frequent, and from time to time the two would slap and punch each other. 'My daughter, why to do abuse me so?', Fredegund asked, 'Look—you may take the things your father has given to me and use them as you like.' And with that she went into her repository and opened a chest that housed

63 See Exodus 11:6.

> valuable jewels and necklaces. For a long time she took out many treasures, handing them to her daughter, who stood next to her. 'I'm too tired now', Fredegund said, 'reach your hand in and take out what you find.' Then, with Rigunth reaching her arm inside and removing valuables from the chest, Fredegund took hold of the lid and brought it down upon her daughter's neck. She leaned on it with all her strength, until the edge of the chest pressed upon Rigunth's throat so hard that her eyes started to protrude from her head. One of the slave girls inside the room cried out in a loud voice: 'Hurry, please, hurry! Look—my lady is being throttled by her mother.' Those who were outside, waiting on them to come out, burst into the room and took the girl away, saving her at the point of death.[64]

Rigunth survived, but she never fully reconciled with her mother. Neither was she the only child to suffer at Fredegund's hands. While under siege in Tournai, Fredegund took her newborn son, Samson, and 'cast him from her side, in the hope that he would die'.[65] Gregory was not entirely clear about her reasoning, but his statement that she did so 'because she feared death' (*ob metum moris*), together with his statement that, like Samson, Fredegund 'fell seriously ill' (*graviter egrotavit*) suggests that the queen might have been worried about catching the boy's disease. Gregory added that, 'since she was not able to achieve this, and having been reproached by the king, she had the child baptised.' Thus, her initial intention was not merely to see Samson die, but to allow him to perish while unbaptised. Gregory never directly expressed his views on the sort of afterlife that awaited unbaptised children, but in his *Life of the Fathers* he discussed the sorrow of a woman whose son fell ill: 'The mother wept, less because her son was to die, but more because he had not yet been reborn by the sacrament of baptism.'[66] Fredegund, needless to say, had no such tears for Samson. She cared more for her own temporal welfare than her son's eternal life.

On one occasion, Gregory allowed Fredegund to show concern for one of her sons when he became ill, though only as part of a complex passage aimed, ultimately, at demonstrating the queen's irredeemable character. Gregory wrote that a plague broke out and spread to several members of Fredegund's family: first her husband Chilperic, then her younger son Dagobert, and, lastly, her eldest son Chlodobert.[67] Only at this point did she begin to feel sorrow and

64 *Historiae*, IX. 34.
65 *Historiae*, V. 22.
66 *Vita patrum*, II. 4.
67 *Historiae*, V. 34.

worry that such misfortune might be the result of her sins. Gregory then put a speech into her mouth stating that God had sent this punishment upon her and her husband for their greed and hoarding of money at the expense of the poor, the orphans, and widows. Fredegund then burned the 'unjust tax lists' (*discriptiones iniquae*) for her cities, and urged her husband to do the same for his. This served as an opportunity for Gregory to have Fredegund confess to her own sinfulness and to affirm that her misfortune was a divine judgement.[68] Gregory made clear, however, that her penitent acts were 'too late' (*sero*), and that God did not accept them: both Dagobert and Chlodobert died from the plague. After their funerals, Chilperic, but not Fredegund, donated a large sum to the poor, to churches, and to cathedrals. The queen, instead, went back to her evil ways; a mere five chapters later in the *Histories* she appears orchestrating the murder of he stepson, Chlodovech. The crimes continued unabated thereafter in Gregory's narrative, and even Fredegund's tax revenues from her cities remained as strong as ever.[69] This passage, therefore, was designed to show that Fredegund was beyond God's mercy. No matter what belated, half-hearted acts of penitence she might conjure on her own behalf, her sins were unforgivable, her soul unredeemable. This passage was not, as some scholars have argued, an attempt to present the queen sympathetically.[70]

The negative tone of this passage was not lost on the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum*, who had esteem for the heroes of the Neustrian past and who generally cast Fredegund in a rather better light.[71] With the *Histories* as its source, the *Liber historiae Francorum* redeployed this passage, purged of its original meaning.[72] Gregory's important word *sero* was removed to make the queen's repentance seem timely. In addition, Fredegund became filled with sorrow at the sight of her sons suffering—both of them rather than merely her eldest, as Gregory had implied. Such maternal grief would have seemed out of place in the *Histories*, given Fredegund's very unmotherly treatment of Samson, but this passage is absent from the *Liber historiae Francorum*—only Samson's death is mentioned, not the events in Tournai.[73] Lastly, Fredegund's repentance

68 This speech is, in fact, an almost verbatim reproduction of the prologue to Book 5, where Gregory lamented the consequences of kings engaging civil wars, as Chilperic had done. See Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V', pp. 303–04.

69 *Historiae*, VI. 45.

70 See, for example, Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', p. 342; and Myers, *Medieval Kingship*, pp. 86–88.

71 On the *Liber historiae Francorum*'s nostalgia for the Neustrian past, see Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 146–59.

72 *Liber historiae Francorum*, 34.

73 Samson's death is mentioned in *Liber historiae Francorum*, 33.

was given a new, higher motive: 'If we lose our sons, at least we might avoid eternal punishment.' What had been a lesson in the futility of belated acts of penitence became an instance of pious insight. Venantius Fortunatus shared this sympathetic interpretation, writing two poems of consolation to the queen and her husband, one soon after Chlodobert and Dagobert died, and another about six months later.[74] He wrote that disease was a consequence of original sin, so the deaths of the two boys from the plague were not the result of any personal sinfulness on the part of the king or queen. Fortunatus showed concern for Fredegund's maternal grief and he instructed her husband to console her and not let her weep excessively.[75] Surprisingly, Fortunatus even referenced the biblical figure Samson among a list of other scriptural heroes, without any apparent worry that he might call to mind Fredegund's other son of the same name.[76]

Gregory's characterisation of Fredegund contrasts his portrayal of Brunhild, illustrated in particular by Brunhild's efforts to retrieve her daughter Ingund from detention in North Africa at the hands of the Byzantines. Unlike Fredegund, who only rescued Rigunth as an afterthought, Brunhild used all of her political leverage on her daughter's behalf. Thus she interrupted a meeting between her son Childebert and his leading men (*priores*) at a villa in the Ardennes to 'issue a complaint to all the noblemen, on behalf of her daughter Ingund, who was still detained in Africa—though she received little consolation.'[77] Though only Gregory mentioned Brunhild's plea in the Ardennes, several extant letters written by the queen to the Byzantine emperor Maurice and his wife Constantina confirm that she worked to secure her daughter's release.[78] Other contemporary sources also indicate that Brunhild

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74 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX. 2–3.

75 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX. 2, ll. 90–93.

76 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX. 2, l. 29.

77 *Historiae*, VIII. 21. Brunhild may have wanted the nobles to reach an arrangement with Byzantium by agreeing to campaign against the Lombards in exchange for Ingund's safe return. For the context, see Ian Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe: Developments East of the Rhine', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 231–53 (pp. 239–43).

78 *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 26, 27, 30, 44. It is not known whether or not Gregory had access to these letters, but he was aware in general of the diplomatic exchange taking place between Austrasia and Byzantium at the time, as apparent, for example, in *Historiae*, X. 2. On the letters, see Andrew Gillett, 'Love and Grief in Post-Imperial Diplomacy: The Letters of Brunhild', in *Studies in Emotions and Power in the Late Roman World: Papers in Honour of Ron Newbold*, ed. by Barbara Sidwell and Danijel Dzino (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), pp. 141–80.

looked after the wellbeing of her children generally: Venantius Fortunatus, for example, praised the queen for the way she raised her son Childebert and her daughter Chlodosinda.[79] Pope Gregory I complimented her for the personal interest she took in Childebert's education and religious formation.[80] And a sixth-century ivory known as the Barberini diptych has also been interpreted as demonstrating Brunhild's concern for her family, since she had the ivory inscribed with the names of her family members and venerated as a religious object.[81] Of course, a reigning queen might expect to enjoy compliments from her contemporaries. (Fredegund received them too, though not from Gregory, of course.)[82] Indeed, Gregory's account is remarkable, not for claiming that Brunhild loved her daughter Ingund, but for comparing Brunhild's committed efforts to rescue the girl with Fredegund's lacklustre attempt to bring Rigunth home. The reader of the *Histories* might almost forget that Ingund died in Africa, while Rigunth returned to her family safely.

Witchcraft and Sacrilege

In the legal texts circulating in sixth-century Gaul, witchcraft was a capital offence. And so it was in the scriptures: 'You shall not permit a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18). Associating Fredegund with sorcery was, therefore, a bold choice on Gregory's part. We have already seen that Fredegund drugged two of her clerics with a potion (*medificatus potio*) that inspired them to undertake a risky assassination mission.[83] Fredegund also equipped these assassins with poisoned daggers (*cultri veneno infici*), as she had done on other occasions.[84]

79 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 8 and appendix VI.

80 Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, VI. 5, ed. by Paul Ewald and Ludwig M. Hartmann, *MGH, Epistolae*, vols I–II (Berlin, 1891–99).

81 See Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut*, p. 181; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 135; and Jean Vezin, 'Une nouvelle lecture de la liste des noms copiée au dos de l'ivoire Barberini', *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*, 7 (1971), 19–53. The object had originally been commissioned by the Byzantine emperor for secular purposes.

82 Chlothar was described as both learned (*litterum eruditus*) and pious (*timens Deum*) in Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV. 42, where it is also stated, as a criticism, that Chlothar was too willing to take advice from women—perhaps a reference to his mother's influence. Likewise, *Liber historiae Francorum*, 36 and 41 mentioned that Fredegund brought the young Chlothar along with her on a victorious campaign.

83 *Historiae*, VIII. 29.

84 See, for example, *Historiae*, IV. 51.

Gregory probably intended this to carry an accusation of sorcery, given the close association of poison, *venenum*, with witchcraft, *veneficium*. Thus Gregory described another of Fredegund's assassinations (this one of a nobleman from Rouen) involving poison (*venenum*) as *maleficia*, a word that also carried connotations of black magic.[85] When Fredegund dispatched two assassins to murder King Sigibert, Gregory wrote that they had been bewitched by the queen: *malificati a Fredegunde regina*.[86] Likewise, when Childebert's envoys arrived at Guntram's court accusing Fredegund of a number of crimes, Gregory had them demanded the king hand over 'the *malefica*'. Here this term likely meant 'witch', rather than the more general sense of 'evildoer' that Gregory expressed with the word *malefactor* instead.[87] On another occasion, Gregory told a story about a woman 'possessed by a spirit that could see the future' (*spiritum phitonis habens*) who used her powers of augury to become rich and famous—so much so that she was regarded as 'something divine' (*aliquid divinum*) by the people. When the woman came to the attention of the local bishop, she realised that she needed to leave, 'so she went to Queen Fredegund, where she stayed in secret'.[88] Apparently Fredegund could be trusted to take in a wayward soothsayer. Gregory abruptly concluded his story, leaving his audience to wonder what role this demoniac played at Fredegund's court.

As was typical of those who dabbled in the black arts, Fredegund worried that others might use witchcraft against her and her family. When two of her two sons died from the plague, for example, Fredegund suspected that her stepson had hired a witch to bring about their deaths.[89] Likewise, when her son Theuderic grew ill and died, Fredegund blamed the *praefectus* Eunius Mummolus and accused him of using 'enchantments' (*incantationes*) and 'evil spells' (*maleficii*) with the help of some Parisian 'witches' (*maleficae*).[90] Gregory was clear, however, that disease alone was the cause of death in each case, and that Fredegund's suspicions were the result of paranoia. Fredegund flirted with the idea of seeking God's help in these situations, but never with wholehearted commitment. When her son Chlothar II fell ill, for example,

85 *Historiae*, VIII. 31. Gregory used *maleficia* in the specific sense of 'black magic', rather than the more general sense of 'evil deeds', on several occasions in his works. See, for example, *Historiae*, III. 29, V. 5, V. 39, VI. 35, IX. 37, X. 8; and *Vita patrum*, XIX. 3.

86 *Historiae*, VIII. 29.

87 *Historiae*, VII. 41. Compare *malefactor* in VI. 6 and VI. 17 with *maleficus* in VII. 14, X. 15, and X. 16.

88 *Historiae*, VII. 44.

89 *Historiae*, V. 39.

90 *Historiae*, VI. 35.

she freed prisoners taken hostage during a campaign against the Bretons and promised to donate a large sum to St Martin's church in Tours.[91] Gregory, however, never mentioned if the queen fulfilled the latter pledge, and he used her release of prisoners as evidence that she had committed treason: Fredegund had connections with the Bretons because she had supported their leader, Waroch against a Merovingian army led by *Dux* Beppolen (whom she wanted dead at any price).[92] Fredegund acknowledged the power of the saints but in a way that fell short of true faith in God's providence. In Gregory's interpretation, she viewed the supernatural as a resource to tap for her own advantage, including both the spiritual powers of the church and the arcane practices of unauthorised peddlers in the unseen: witches, soothsayers, and apothecaries.[93]

'Even the demons believe, and they tremble', reads the biblical Epistle of James—yet Fredegund never so much as twitched.[94] On one occasion, both she and Guntram hired a man named Claudius to kill a former official, Eberulf. Because the intended victim had taken sanctuary in St Martin's church in Tours, Guntram ordered Claudius to lure Eberulf outside, 'lest the holy church be defiled', but Fredegund had no such reservations, promising to reward the assassin handsomely 'even if Eberulf is cut down in the very atrium'.[95] Claudius struck his mark in the church; both died in the ensuing struggle and St Martin's was indeed 'desecrated by bloodshed' (*humano sanguine polluerunt*). This was, of course, the same church that Fredegund had promised to reward with lavish donations if her son Chlothar recovered from his illness. Though she might give the impression of piety from time to time, Fredegund remained selfish in her core. She was rather like the unnamed wife of Maurus, a man inflicted with insanity by St Lupus after he foolishly desecrated the saint's church: the woman donated many gifts but, when her husband died regardless, she took them all back.[96] Gregory was clearly unimpressed with this *quid pro quo* approach to piety, and elsewhere he praised two women who had given thanks to God at St Martin's shrine even after their prayers for a cure had gone unanswered (as a rewarded for their unquestioning faith they were cured later).[97]

91 *Historiae*, X. 11.

92 *Historiae*, X. 9.

93 On the concept of *reverentia* in Gregory's works, see Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', pp. 230–35.

94 James 2:19.

95 *Historiae*, VII. 29.

96 *Gloria confessorum*, 66.

97 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 54 and II. 56.

In contrast to Fredegund, Gregory presented Brunhild as the intended victim of several assassinations by poison or witchcraft. These plots were usually Fredegund's conniving, but on one occasion Brunhild was the target of a conspiracy hatched within her own household.[98] Two officials, the *comes stabuli* Sunnegisil and the *referendarius* Gallomagnus, persuaded the nurse for the royal children (*nutrix infantum*), Septimina, to use her close relationship with Brunhild's son Childebert to their advantage. If she could not persuade Childebert to oust his mother from power, then Septimina planned to use witchcraft to kill Childebert and put his young sons on the throne, banishing Brunhild all the same. Brunhild discovered the plot, however, and under torture Septimina confessed not only to the act of treason but also to the separate crime of using witchcraft to murder her husband for the sake of her lover Droctulf, another conspirator who also helped with the royal children. Sunnegisil and Gallomagnus fled and took sanctuary in a church. In contrast to Fredegund, Brunhild's son refused to shed the conspirators' blood in such a holy place: 'We are Christians and it is a sacrilegious crime to remove someone from a church for punishment.' Sunnegisil and Gallomagnus wilfully agreed to leave the church and stand trial, which resulted in the confiscation of their property and a temporary exile.[99] Gregory thus presented Brunhild and her son as the victims of witchcraft; they punished the guilty justly but not without mercy, and according to Christian principles.[100]

Conclusion

Looking beyond Gregory's interpretation, Brunhild and Fredegund may not have been so different. Both queens reigned at the side of their husbands and then remained politically influential during their widowhood as mothers of their minor sons. Both formed close, politically useful relationships with some bishops and quarrelled with others. Both cared about the education of their children and made efforts to rescue daughters who fell into the hands of rival powers. They treated their inferiors in a manner befitting a ruler, defending

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98 *Historiae*, IX. 38.

99 In *Historiae*, IX. 12, Childebert's agents killed a fugitive who had taken sanctuary in a church. Gregory absolved the king of guilt by stating he was unaware of the circumstances.

100 We should note that Gregory's contemporary and namesake, Pope Gregory I, objected to Brunhild's tolerance of the trade in Christian slaves by Jewish merchants. See Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, IX. 213 and IX. 215. See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 126–27.

honour and threatening violence much as did kings and other powerful men. Their skilful evocation of both fear and love would have made Machiavelli blush. They donated to the church, venerated the saints, and kept an eye on those who might use illegitimate sources of spiritual power, such as witchcraft or poison, with due attention. Other sources recognised this fundamental similarity: Venantius Fortunatus, ever the dutiful royal client, praised Fredegund and Brunhild alike,[101] while the *Chronicles* of Fredegar, written from the safety of a later generation, criticised them equally. Yet Gregory insisted they were rivals and moral opposites. His task was not an easy one. Rumours of Fredegund's misdeeds may have abounded, but stories of Brunhild's virtues were rather more obscure. Thus, Gregory carefully arranged his material, encouraging his audience to compare the two and to find Brunhild to be the better. Why so complex a narrative strategy? As we shall see in the next chapter, Gregory laboured under burdensome constraints, coming into personal conflict with Fredegund, while finding Brunhild to be a powerful, if intimidating, patron.

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101 See George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 27–29.

CHAPTER 7

Brunhild and Fredegund, II: Queens, Politics, and the Writing of History

> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God, so whoever resists the powers resists what God has ordained, and those who resist will incur judgment.
>
> ROMANS 13:1–2

Introduction

The bishops of the Merovingian kingdoms were necessarily politicians. They were drawn from the upper ranks of society, and their office brought financial, social, and spiritual resources. Such political connections also had their risks, and sacredness was no guarantee of security.[1] Gregory exemplified these circumstances. He belonged to an aristocratic family and he became bishop of an important diocese, one that changed hands between the different Merovingian kingdoms several times during his tenure.[2] Though at first glance Gregory appears to have been at ease criticising the powers that be, scholarship has carefully demonstrated that several kings, especially Sigibert, Chilperic, and Guntram, impacted the content of the *Histories*, at least while they ruled Tours at different times during Gregory's tenure.[3] Rather less notice has been paid to the important women of Gaul. Yet never was Gregory more circumspect than in his treatment of Queen Brunhild, who, as we shall see, enjoyed influence within the kingdom of Austrasia, and the city of Tours, for much of his career. In contrast, Gregory showed little restraint in denouncing Fredegund and detailing her many crimes. That is, save one. In his writings, Gregory never expressly accused Fredegund of marital infidelity, which might question the legitimacy of her husband Chilperic's sons and undermine their right to rule—a sensitive matter during the king's reign and thereafter, as Guntram exercised authority in Neustria as the guardian of Chilperic's young

1 See the analysis of Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 21–28.
2 On Gregory's pastoral and civic responsibilities in Tours, see Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, pp. 313–26.
3 See, for example, Wood, 'The Secret Histories', p. 257; and Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', p. 347.

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son, Chlothar II. Yet what Gregory could not say openly he implied, in several cleverly constructed passages within the *Histories* that nudged his audience toward that very conclusion. Thus, Gregory the aristocrat and bishop may have thought he was in a privileged position to critique those in power, but he also knew that candour had a cost. A combination of fear and respect occasionally stayed his pen, never more so than with Brunhild.

Brunhild, Gregory, and the Austrasian Court

Gregory's deference to Brunhild resulted from his own connections to the Austrasian court, in which the queen enjoyed prominence for many years. Direct evidence linking the two is sparse, because Gregory was reluctant to provide it, but Venantius Fortunatus wrote that Brunhild had been responsible for Gregory's appointment as bishop of Tours (together with her husband Sigibert and Chlothar I's former queen, Radegund).[4] Fortunatus also wrote that Gregory had been consecrated in Reims, which often served as a home to the Austrasian court, rather than in Tours, as was canonically required. Based on this, Martin Heinzelmann has quite reasonably speculated that Gregory acquired the favour of the Austrasian king and queen during regular stays at court from the mid-560s onward, and that he may well have taken an oath of allegiance to Sigibert and his successor, Childebert II, whose reign began under Brunhild's guardianship and lasted beyond Gregory's own lifetime.[5] As we saw in Chapter 4, Gregory upheld the marriage of Sigibert and Brunhild as an ideal, and he used Childebert's regnal years as the chronological framework for Books V–X of the *Histories*, even though Tours fell under the control of Chilperic and Guntram for most of those years.[6] Gregory even served as a diplomat in 588, representing Austrasian interests at Guntram's court in Chalon-sur-Saône, as we saw at the beginning of Chapter 6.[7] Three years previously, Gregory had attended a meeting in Koblenz between Childebert

4 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, V. 3. This is also discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 23–24.

5 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, p. 30; and Heinzelmann, 'Bischof und Herrschaft', pp. 72–73. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 4–5 speculated that Gregory may have attended Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild in Metz c. 566 and met the young Venantius Fortunatus for the first time while there.

6 See Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, pp. 148–51 and n. 11. Breukelaar also provided an analysis of Gregory's connections to the Austrasian court (pp. 201–07), but he emphasised Sigibert's influence upon the bishop to the exclusion of Brunhild, who received little attention.

7 *Historiae*, IX. 20.

and envoys from Burgundy, where he spoke on behalf of the Austrasians and assured the envoys that Childebert was committed to his alliance with Guntram.[8] Gregory was thus closely connected to the Austrasian court, to Queen Brunhild, to her husband, and her son.

Brunhild's position in Austrasia fluctuated over the years, but she remained politically powerful for most of Gregory's tenure as bishop. Upon her arrival in the Merovingian kingdoms and her marriage to Sigibert c. 567, Brunhild enjoyed wealth and prestige.[9] Even her opponents acknowledged her influence at the time, evidenced by her confrontation with Ursio and Berthefred (discussed in Chapter 6), who declared: 'Let it be enough for you to have held the kingdom under your husband!'[10] Likewise, Venantius Fortunatus presented Brunhild's importance as on par with that of her husband.[11] Indeed, Brunhild accompanied Sigibert during a campaign against Chilperic in 575, and when Germanus of Paris sought to intervene and end the conflict he wrote to her directly.[12] Brunhild's fortunes changed, momentarily, when on the eve of victory her husband died by an assassin's hands: she fell captive to Chilperic and entered into her time of 'indignity' (*contumelia*).[13] But this did not last for long. Brunhild was able to arrange a marriage to Chilperic's son, Merovech, during the prince's rebellion—discussed in detail below.[14] By 577, Brunhild had returned to the Austrasian court and began to exert influence on behalf of her young son, whose official guardian (*nutricius*), Gogo, was her old associate.[15] Indeed, Gogo had been a prominent figure in Sigibert's day, perhaps even serving as the king's *maior domus*.[16] Brunhild's standing under the next *nutricius*, Wandelen,

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8 *Historiae*, VIII. 13, VIII. 15–17, with Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, p. 61; and Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit*, vol. I, pp. 215–16.

9 *Historiae*, IV. 27.

10 *Historiae*, VI. 4.

11 George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 158.

12 *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 9. Germanus also met with Sigibert (*Historiae*, IV. 51). This is discussed in Chapter 6, p. 130.

13 *Historiae*, V. 1, VI. 4, and IX. 9.

14 *Historiae*, V. 1, V. 18, and IX. 9.

15 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII. 1. Gogo had escorted Brunhild from her Visigothic homeland to Sigibert's kingdom upon her betrothal.

16 The suggestion that Gogo may have served as the Austrasian *maior domus* under Sigibert derives from Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII. 4. Gogo also worked closely with Brunhild's 'faithful servant' Lupus. See *Carmina*, VII. 2–4 and the discussions by George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 79–82, 136–40, and Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 14–21. For Lupus as Brunhild's *fidelis*, see *Historiae*, VI. 4.

who served from 581–84, is less clear; scholarship has generally seen this as a time of weakness for the queen, since Austrasia entered into an alliance with Neustria, then ruled by her nemeses Chilperic and Fredegund.[17] But Brunhild was not without influence in Austrasia even during this period, since (as we saw in Chapter 6) she was able to appoint Innocentius as bishop of Rodez and press her territorial claims over nearby Cahors.[18] Following Wandelen's death, Brunhild assumed guardianship of Childebert directly, without the appointment of another *nutricius*.[19] In 587, she acquired the revenues collected from five cities, which had once been given to her sister Galswinth and which she regarded as her rightful inheritance.[20] It was at this time, with Brunhild entrenching herself as the dominant force at court even after Childebert had come of age, that her enemies plotted, and failed, to remove her from power in two poorly executed coups in 587 and 590, discussed in detail below. Afterward, Brunhild faced little or no resistance at court.

Brunhild, therefore, remained a prominent figure in Austrasia for almost all of Gregory's career: 567–75 (when Gregory became bishop), 577–81, and then 584 until Gregory's death c. 594. As we saw in Chapter 6, Gregory had nothing bad to say of the queen, and he arranged his material in his *Histories* to present her as the preferred counterpart to the wicked Fredegund. In addition to this, Brunhild may also have shared Gregory's devotion to St Martin. When she fled from the grasp of her enemy Chilperic, for example, she took sanctuary in a church dedicated to St Martin in Rouen.[21] When Venantius Fortunatus visited Brunhild and her son in Koblenz, he delivered a poem to them on the merits of St Martin, knowing that this subject would be well received.[22] Brunhild also commissioned the construction of a church in Autun dedicated to St Martin,

17 *Historiae*, VI. 1 and VIII. 22. See Kurth, 'La reine Brunehaut', pp. 283–88; and Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West', pp. 105 and 108.

18 *Historiae*, VI. 37–38.

19 *Historiae*, VIII. 22. Childebert reached majority in 585 according to the calculations of Ewig, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', p. 22. Though there may not necessarily have been a defined age when princes were regarded as mature (as Ewig suggested), a letter written in 585 (*Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 44) hints that Childebert had just recently come of age.

20 *Historiae*, IX. 11 and IX. 20. See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 130–31; Gerda Heydemann, 'Zur Gestaltung der Rolle Brunhildes in merowingischer Historiographie', in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Conradini and others (Vienna: Österreiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 73–86 (p. 78); and Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', pp. 12–13.

21 *Historiae*, V. 2.

22 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 7.

which she may have intended to be her final resting place.[23] Perhaps Brunhild's interest in St Martin even explains her direct involvement in appointing Gregory as bishop of Tours, which housed the saint's famous shrine. As a fellow devotee to St Martin and an Austrasian sympathiser, Gregory clearly had reasons to admire Brunhild. We must also remember his reasons to fear her. As we shall see, those who conspired against Brunhild, and those who were merely suspected of doing so, faired poorly indeed.

The Rebellion of Merovech

We have already encountered the rebellion of Merovech in Chapter 6, when the prince disobeyed his father Chilperic's orders to march on Poitiers and travelled to Rouen instead, where he launched his rebellion, enlisting the support of the local bishop Praetextatus and Brunhild, whom he married.[24] This took place in 575, shortly after Sigibert's assassination, when Chilperic had seized the greater part of Brunhild's wealth and taken possession of her daughters. Gregory had little interest in describing the failed rebellion for its own sake: he mentioned only what was necessary to contextualise two lengthy passages on events that occurred in its aftermath, one on the trial of Praetextatus and another on Merovech's attempt to gain sanctuary within St Martin's church in Tours, which cause Gregory all manner of problems.[25] More importantly for us, Gregory also sought to avoid reference to Brunhild's involvement in the affair except where strictly necessary, and he presented her as a passive victim, distraught in her grief and caught up in the manoeuvrings of a rebellious prince.[26]

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23 Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, XII. 5. For the church as a possible burial site, see Karl Krüger, *Königsgrabkirchen der Fränken, Angelsachsen und Langobarden bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Fink, 1971), p. 161.

24 *Historiae*, V. 2.

25 For an account of Merovech's revolt that focuses on the prince's stay in Tours (*Historiae*, V. 14), see Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, pp. 278–84.

26 Merovech's precise ambitions remain uncertain; see Hofmann, 'The Men Who Would be Kings', pp. 134–37; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', pp. 10–12; and Reinhard Schneider, *Königswahl und Königserhebung im Frühmittelalter: Unterschungen zur Herrschaftsnachfolge bei den Langobarden und Merowingern* (Stuttgart: Hiersmann, 1972), pp. 96–97. On Merovech's rebellion in general, see also Thilo Offergeld, *Reges pueri: Des Königtum Minderjähriger im frühen Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2001), pp. 201–14.

Indeed, the assassination of Sigibert had left Brunhild 'so beside herself in her lamentation and grief that she knew not what to do'.[27]

Surely Brunhild had played a more active role than Gregory admitted. After all, she clearly gained from the affair, thwarting Chilperic's efforts to capitalise on Sigibert's death and, by 577, returning prominence within the Austrasian court. The *Chronicles* of Fredegar, written during the seventh century, omitted all mention of Brunhild's lamentations and grief and presented her as a rational, calculating actor. Of course, Fredegar held the queen in low regard, and he surely went too far in claiming that she had actually orchestrated her husband's assassination in the first place.[28] But Fredegar was not alone in offering an interpretation of the queen as an agent in the rebellion. Also in the seventh century, a scribe produced a redacted version of Gregory's *Histories* which, among other alterations, changed Brunhild from the passive to the active party in arranging marriage to Merovech.[29] Thus Gregory's sentence, 'He [Merovech] brought her into matrimony and was married to Queen Brunhild there' (*ibi Brunichildae reginae coniungitur eamque sibi in matrimonio sociavit*),[30] was changed to 'she brought [him] into matrimony' (*ea quoque in matrimonio sociavit*).[31] Though this alteration may simply have been a scribal error, rather than an attempt to provide an alternate reading of Merovech's rebellion, it is conspicuous given that standard Latin marital terminology rendered the man as the grammatical subject who brought the bride into matrimony.[32]

27 *Historiae*, V. 1.

28 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 72 and IV. 42.

29 On the manuscript transmission of the *Histories*, see Hilchenbach, *Das vierte Buch der Historien von Gregor von Tours*, vol. 1, pp. 7–90; and Martin Heinzelmann and Pascal Bourgain, 'L'œuvre de Grégoire de Tours: la diffusion des manuscrits', in *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois*, ed. by Nancy Gauthier and Henri Galinié (Tours: Fédération pour l'édition de la Revue archéologique du Centre, 1997), pp. 273–317.

30 *Historiae*, V. 2. This is the reading of a ninth-century manuscript held at the monastery of Micy, which contains fragments of the *Historiae* that were composed no later than c. 650, labelled as A2 in the edition of Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison.

31 This is the reading of the five manuscripts (labelled as B-class in the edition of Krusch and Levison), which date from the late-seventh to the early-ninth centuries, and which contained a six-book redaction of the *Histories*. Normally, the B-class manuscripts concur with the A2 fragments. (The eleventh-century A1 manuscript agrees with the reading found in the A2 fragments.)

32 See Mazo Karras, 'The History of Marriage', pp. 145–47. Both the *Chronicles* of Fredegar and the *Liber historiae Francorum* followed convention and rendered Merovech as the grammatical subject, even though they drew upon the B-class manuscripts. See Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III. 74; and *Liber historiae Francorum*, 33. I would like to thank Julia Hofmann, who called the issue of Gregory's language to my attention at the Leeds International

Chilperic regarded the marriage with deep suspicion and, when he travelled to Rouen to sort the matter out, Brunhild and Merovech took refuge in a church atop the city walls. Gregory narrated what followed in a confusingly terse bit of prose. He claimed that Chilperic had failed to lure the couple out 'by many dirty tricks' (*in multis ingeniis*) because they were too clever to fall for them. But then Brunhild and Merovech agreed to leave the church and meet Chilperic with open arms because the king 'promised' (*iuravit eis*) not to separate them. Whatever inspired this sudden moment of trust, it proved to be a miscalculation: only a few days later Chilperic separated the couple, taking Merovech with him to Soissons. The author of the *Liber historiae Francorum* seems to have found this turn of events jarring as well, adding the word 'falsely' (*dolose*) to describe Chilperic's promise.[33] With the king and his son exiting the scene, Brunhild also rather mysteriously disappeared from the stage. What happened to her? Equally strange is the disappearance of Merovech's army (*exercitus*) from Gregory's narrative. Originally, the rebellious prince had been dispatched with an army to Poitiers, before he diverted to Rouen. Gregory made no further mention of this army, even when Chilperic himself came to Rouen intent on ending the revolt.

Perhaps the most obscure part of Gregory's narrative is the sudden and unexplained appearance of Brunhild at the Austrasian court in 577, mentioned several chapters later without ado.[34] In the intervening chapters, Gregory had detailed the plight of Merovech: after being taken to Soissons he found himself the object of his father's enduring suspicion; he fled from one place to another before attempting to reunite with Brunhild, only to be turned away 'by the Austrasians' (*ab Austrasiis*). One must assume that Brunhild herself rejected her new husband, who was of no political advantage to her anymore now that she was back at the Austrasian court, but how she got there is anyone's guess. The author of the *Liber historiae Francorum* found the omission too glaring to ignore, adding that Childebert had negotiated his mother's return as part of a deal he made with Chilperic.[35] Whatever the case, Brunhild had clearly played events to her advantage. The others involved met tragic ends: Merovech was eventually captured and, rather than face his father's punishment, he took his own life;[36] Praetextatus was exiled and later assassinated by Fredegund;

Medieval Conference (2008). My interpretation, however, differs from the one offered in Hofmann, 'The Men Who Would be Kings', pp. 125–26.

33 *Liber historiae Francorum*, 33.

34 *Historiae*, v. 14.

35 *Liber historiae Francorum*, 33.

36 *Historiae*, v. 18.

Merovech's mother Audovera also fell victim to Fredegund's scheming.[37] In the hands of another author, Brunhild might have been presented as the mastermind behind these events, but in Gregory's telling she barely made an appearance, and then only as a victim, too distraught at the loss of Sigibert to take any control over the situation.

The Conspirators of 587 and 590

In 587, Brunhild thwarted a *coup d'état* involving a trio of leading men in Austrasia: Ursio, Berthefred, and Rauching.[38] There plan was as follows: Rauching would assassinate her son Childebert and frame a group of envoys from Tours and Poitiers for the crime, while Ursio and Berthefred would simultaneously launch a military campaign with the backing of Neustria. They were as daring as they were unsuccessful: the coup failed, the trio of conspirators were killed, and suspicion quickly fell upon two other Austrasian officials with connections to Neustria: the *dux* Guntram Boso and Aegidius, bishop of Reims.[39] Guntram Boso, whose shifting allegiances had long made him an object of distrust, was tried for treason and put to death.[40] But Aegidius survived the aftermath of 587, only to come under suspicion again after another coup attempt three years later by the officials Sunnegisil and Gallomagnus. This second coup of 590 we have discussed in Chapter 6.[41] Within the *Histories*, Gregory presented Ursio, Berthefred, Rauching, and Guntram Boso as lowlife characters who had secretly opposed Brunhild ever since she had first entered the kingdom. He wrote as a supporter of the queen and with the benefit of hindsight. Behind Gregory's harsh words, however, one finds hints that these men had once been loyal and had enjoyed Gregory's esteem—traces of an older attitude which he never fully erased from his works.

After mentioning Guntram Boso's death, for example, Gregory summarised his legacy with curt disdain: 'He was fickle in his conduct, steadfast in his greed, longing for what others had beyond compare; he made vows to everyone and kept them to none.'[42] Worse still, Guntram Boso 'frequently hurled

37 *Historiae*, V. 40.
38 *Historiae*, IX. 9.
39 *Historiae*, IX. 19.
40 *Historiae*, IX. 10.
41 *Historiae*, IX. 38.
42 *Historiae*, IX. 10.

abuse and derision at Queen Brunhild'.[43] Gregory supported his claim with examples: Guntram Boso had secretly entered a pact with Fredegund and assisted her efforts to assassinate Merovech, who foolishly thought that the *dux* might help him return to Brunhild after his failed rebellion.[44] Gregory even described how Guntram Boso had been put on trial by Childebert for desecrating a church, robbing the grave of a woman buried within its walls.[45] This picture of Guntram Boso is consistent throughout the *Histories*, though on one occasion Gregory described the *dux* with slightly more nuance: 'In truth Guntram [Boso] was otherwise good (*vero alias bonus*), but he was far too willing to make false oaths, and he never entered into a pact with his allies that he was not straightaway ready to forget.'[46] In his work on *The Virtues of St Martin*, however, Gregory described Guntram Boso in remarkably different terms. The *dux* had acted heroically when his boat capsized on the Loire: with he and all his men facing the threat of drowning, Guntram Boso invoked the intercession of St Martin. 'Be not afraid, for I know that the right hand of the saint is ready to offer help whenever it is required', he declared, thus echoing the words spoken by Jesus when he calmed the Sea of Galilee, telling his apostles to 'be not afraid' (*nolite timere*).[47] As one might expect, St Martin came to the rescue. Presumably, Gregory wrote this passage at a time when Guntram Boso was regarded as a loyal servant to the Austrasian kingdom.

In contrast, Gregory never waivered in his reproach of Rauching, 'a man full of every vanity, swollen with pride, shameless in self-aggrandizement, who dealt with his inferiors in such a manner that he seemed to lack all humanity'.[48] Thus, when Rauching discovered that two of his slaves had married without his consent and taken refuge in a church, he promised the local priest he would not separate them—only to order them buried alive, but in the same grave. Gregory had other stories of Rauching's cruelty to tell:

> When a slave stood before him while he ate, holding a lit candle as is customary, Rauching had the slave's legs stripped bare, with the candle held tightly between his shins, until it burned down. When one candle was extinguished, another was lit in the same manner, until the whole of the

43 *Historiae*, IX. 8.

44 *Historiae*, V. 14.

45 *Historiae*, VIII. 21.

46 *Historiae*, V. 14.

47 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, II. 17. See Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; and John 6:20.

48 *Historiae*, V. 3.

> slave's legs were burned. If he made a sound, or if he moved a little from one place to another, he was immediately threatened with a unsheathed sword, so that Rauching could relish at the sight of the slave's tears.[49]

Nevertheless, there are hints within the *Histories* that Rauching served the Austrasian court and its queen faithfully for many years. In 581, for example, Rauching seized the *dux* Ennodius, on the suspicion that he had once stolen from Sigibert's treasury, and handed him over to Childebert.[50] Around this time, Rauching also thwarted an assassination attempt targeting Brunhild and Childebert, which had been arranged by Fredegund. Thus, the coup of 587 represented a recent change of allegiance for Rauching—treacherous, yes, but not a sign of his secret, lifelong Neustrian loyalties. Something must have happened between 581 and 587 to inspire this dramatic change of heart, but Gregory preferred not to say. His explanation was simply that Rauching had always been bad; one could expect nothing more from him.

Gregory had no reason to sympathise with Rauching or Guntram Boso, but he did with Aegidius of Reims, who had consecrated him as bishop upon his appointment to his post in Tours.[51] One might expect to see Gregory defending his senior colleague during the latter's trial for his alleged involvement in the conspiracy of 587.[52] After all, Gregory had gone to great lengths to defend Praetextatus of Rouen during his trial at the hands of Chilperic and Fredegund, telling the king that he risked 'both his kingdom and his legacy' for persecuting 'one of God's servants'.[53] Indeed, Gregory had once faced such a tribunal himself, as we shall see below. Yet he made no effort to defend Aegidius—neither in his writings nor, it seems, in person. He even neglected to mention whether or not he had attended the trial at all. And when protests were made against Aegidius's imprisonment prior to the trial, Gregory noted that these were made by 'other bishops' (*alii sacerdotes*)—not by himself. Yet the case against Aegidius was weak. Most of the evidence came from his own collection of letters, which supposedly contained 'many disparaging remarks toward Brunhild' (*multa de inproperiis Brunichildis*), as Gregory noted without further detail.[54] Another letter, this one written to Aegidius by Chilperic, was singled out because it contained the sentence: 'if the root of the matter is not removed,

49 *Historiae*, V. 3.
50 *Historiae*, VIII. 26.
51 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, V. 3.
52 *Historiae*, IX. 14.
53 *Historiae*, V. 18.
54 *Historiae*, X. 19.

then the stalk that rises from the ground will not wither.' This statement was taken as a coded message that Brunhild needed to be killed, though such an interpretation hardly seems definitive.[55] Aegidius claimed the letters were forged, and it is tempting to believe him. Why would he have kept such incriminating letters for three years following the failed coup of 587 until their seizure in 590? Moreover, other bishops who had found themselves on trial in similar circumstances, such as Charterius of Périgueux, had used this forgery defence successfully.[56] Nevertheless, the evidence from the letters was accepted by the tribunal, since 'the bishop was unable to offer a refutation', as Gregory noted unsympathetically. Aegidius even produced evidence on his behalf: documents that showed domains allegedly given to him by Chilperic had in fact been gifts from the Austrasian court. Ironically these were deemed to be forgeries and perjury was added to his list of crimes.

Lastly, Aegidius was accused of accepting money from Chilperic to facilitate the downfall of another king: Guntram. This accusation was based on a known visit Aegidius had made to Chilperic's court during the time of rapprochement between Austrasia and Neustria, from 581–83, when such plans were actually in Childebert's interests.[57] This final accusation may suggest the real reason Aegidius had been put on trial: he had connections to the Neustrian court. Such connections might have been an asset from 581–83, but they had become a liability by 590.[58] This also explains why Gregory may have been so anxious to distance himself from Aegidius, since he too had met with Chilperic in 581. Gregory downplayed his own personal involvement with the Neustrian court, and he claimed that his visit had nothing to do with politics.[59] Curiously, Gregory had also met with Aegidius in 583 just before the latter was dispatched to Chilperic's court as part of an Austrasian diplomatic mission.[60] Given that Tours had fallen under Neustrian control at the time, Gregory had little choice but to work with Chilperic.[61] Thus, he may have watched nervously in 590 as Aegidius fell from power, worried that his own past dealings with the Neustrians might be cause for suspicion. His loyalties to his colleague

55 *Historiae*, X. 19.

56 See *Historiae*, VI. 22.

57 *Historiae*, VI. 3; VI. 31.

58 For Aegidius's prior association with Neustria, see *Historiae*, V. 18 and VI. 31.

59 *Historiae*, VI. 2 and VI. 5. See Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, p. 30; and Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p. 63.

60 *Historiae*, VI. 27, VI. 31, and *Virtutes sancti Martini*, III. 17. See Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 73 and 267, n. 81; and Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', pp. 344–46.

61 Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', p. 43.

were enough to prevent him from writing an invective as he had done with Rauching and Guntram Boso, but not enough to inspire a vigorous defence. Gregory wisely kept his distance—yet another example of how respect, or at least fear, of Brunhild and her court led him to discuss a matter carefully in his *Histories*.

Fredegund and the Histories

In 580, Gregory was brought to the Neustrian town of Berny-Rivière and put on trial by Chilperic on the grounds that he had slandered Fredegund as an adulteress.[62] Gregory insisted upon his innocence and claimed that the charges against him had been invented by his local enemies in Tours, led by the disgruntled former *comes* of the city, Leudast.[63] With discernible pride he insisted that 'an inferior is not to be believed over a bishop'—and he recounted Leudast's servile origins, unsavoury rise to prominence, and inevitable downfall.[64] Gregory's rank thus won his acquittal, and Leudast admitted, under torture, that he had fabricated the accusation as part of an elaborate conspiracy to delegitimise Chilperic's sons from Fredegund and oust this branch of the royal family in favour of another branch (that of Chilperic's former wife, Audovera). Even though Gregory was ultimately judged innocent, the charge of adultery had been serious: as Chilperic himself asserted, 'the accusation against my wife holds an invective against me'.[65] Gregory had been in real jeopardy, and he probably feared for his life.[66] Indeed, at one point his enemies had become

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62 On Gregory's trial, see Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', pp. 340–41; Wood, 'The Secret Histories', pp. 257–58; Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, pp. 14–16; and Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 70–73.

63 *Historiae*, v. 47. Leudast may have been removed from his office because, in the previous year, Tours had failed to provide men for a Neustrian campaign against Brittany (*Historiae*, v. 26).

64 *Historiae*, v. 49.

65 *Historiae*, v. 49: '*Crimen uxoris meae meum habetur obprobrium*'. This cannot mean that *any* charge levelled at a queen was an insult to Chilperic, since Gregory was able to make all sorts of accusations against Fredegund without any obvious consequence. On the use of accusations of adultery against a queen to undermine an heir's right to rule, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 94–98 and 125. On bishops questioning the legitimacy of royal offspring and the political consequences, see Fouracre, 'Why Were So Many Bishops Killed'.

66 The danger Gregory faced at trial was questioned by Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', pp. 340–41, who observed that Gregory described a confrontation he had with Chilperic over

so confident in his demise that they began taking an inventory of the cathedral treasury—a procedure normally undertaken after the death of a bishop.[67] They may also have been looking for incriminating material, such as a collection of letters (as happened to Aegidius) or, indeed, a candid *Histories*.[68] This close brush with danger taught Gregory an important lesson, it seems, as he never *explicitly* described Fredegund as an adulteress in his writings—treachery, sacrilege, assassinations, and witchcraft yes, but never adultery.

Upon close examination, however, it seems Gregory did attempt to raise doubts about Fredegund's marital fidelity with his *Histories*, but *implicitly*—relying on innuendo and subtle hints to make his point.[69] In his account of the trial at Berny-Rivière, for example, Gregory feigned outrage at the suggestion that he had gone around Tours accusing the queen of adultery: 'Truthfully I denied saying this; others may have heard as much, but I did not think

theology (*Historiae*, v. 44) out of chronological sequence, and that it had actually occurred on the eve of the trial (v. 49). In the confrontation, Gregory denounced Chilperic's heretical views with such fervour that the king became 'enraged' (*iratus*). If Gregory had truly feared for his life on the eve of trial, then surely he would not have confronted the king so forcefully. Therefore, Halsall concluded, Gregory must have exaggerated the danger he faced at trial. Yet Gregory may have just as well exaggerated his bravery in rebuking Chilperic's theology. Indeed, Gregory's presentation of theological debates are among the most artificially constructed passages in the *Histories*. Elsewhere (vi. 5), for example, he claimed that he had silenced a learned Jew's arguments against the divinity of Jesus by citing to him from the Jewish scriptures—but his account included one verse drawn from the Book of Baruch (3:36–38), found in Christian compilations of the Old Testament but not among the Hebrew texts, another verse that does not appear in the bible at all ('*Et Deus* [...], *et homo, et quis cognovit eum*'), and also the infamous 'from a tree' (*a ligno*) emendation to Psalm 96:10 that had been a source of debate between Christians and Jews at least since the time of Justin Martyr (see his *Apologia*, i. 41 and *Dialogue with Trypho*, 73); yet Gregory claimed he won the argument easily! The danger Gregory faced at his trial finds some external corroboration (see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p. 72; cf. Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', p. 342, n. 23); while his bravery in rebuking Chilperic does not.

67 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 16. See canon 6 of the Council of Orléans (533) in *Concilia Galliae*, pp. 99–100.

68 Ian Wood, 'Letters and Letter-Collections from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: The Prose Works of Avitus of Vienne', in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L. T. Bethell*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: Hambeldon Press, 1993), pp. 29–41 (pp. 41–42).

69 On what follows, see Sigmund Hellmann, 'Studien zur mittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung. I. Gregor von Tours', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 107 (1911), 1–43 (pp. 27–29); Wood, 'The Secret Histories', pp. 257–59; Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', pp. 158–64; and Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours, Fredegund, and the Paternity of Chlothar ii'.

it up!'[70] Thus Gregory left his audience to believe that there were indeed rumours circulating about Fredegund's infidelity, even if he was not responsible for them himself. In a few other carefully worded passages, Gregory reinforced this innuendo, without directly stating it to be his own committed view.[71] When he recounted Fredegund's assassination of Praetextatus, for example, he described her son Chlothar II as 'the son who is said to be from Chilperic', inserting the word *dicitur* to add a sense of uncertainty.[72] Gregory also claimed that even Guntram had his doubts, when he put a speech into the king's mouth questioning Chlothar's paternity, which he issued in Paris 'in front of everyone' (*coram omnibus*):

> My brother Chilperic is said (*dicitur*) to have left a son behind when he died. At the mother's request, the child's governors asked me to receive him from the holy font on the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, but they never came.
>
> [Guntram then lists a series of such broken engagements: Easter, the Feast of St John the Baptist, and further still.]
>
> [...] And look, I'm here now, and the boy is still kept hidden, withheld from me, which makes me think they made an empty promise; and so I believe the boy is the son of one of our leading men. If he had been of our stock, then they would have surely brought him to me. Know, therefore, that I will not accept him unless presented with sure evidence about the matter.[73]

Fredegund was able to assuage Guntram's doubts by assembling three bishops and three hundred leading men, who swore oaths on her behalf. Such a display of support may well have proved persuasive, not only as a show of force, but also as it drew upon the established legal custom of compurgation.[74] Within

70 *Historiae*, V. 49.

71 Gregory used a similar technique for other matters; see, for example, Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion', pp. 62–66; Wood, 'The Secret Histories'; Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, p. 95; James, '*Beati pacifici*'; and Walter Goffart, 'The Conversions of Avitus of Clermont, and Similar Passages in Gregory of Tours', repr. in Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 293–317.

72 *Historiae*, VIII. 31.

73 *Historiae*, VIII. 9.

74 On compurgation, see Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 30–33. The custom appears in various places throughout the *Lex Ribvaria* and the *Pactus legis Salicae*, often in reference to crimes for

the context of the *Histories*, however, the use of witnesses to affirm Fredegund's good character, and thus innocence, was unlikely to impress.

Gregory might have avoided directly questioning Fredegund's sexual probity while she had been married to Chilperic, but in her widowhood he showed no such reserve. Thus, Fredegund had attempted, and embarrassingly failed, to seduce a Neustrian official named Eberulf.[75] Following her rejection, she became determined to have Eberulf killed. Gregory was clear that this occurred 'after the death of the king' (*post mortem regis*), so it was not an accusation of adultery, but fornication was perhaps not so dissimilar. In another example, the recently widowed Fredegund excused herself from dinner with Guntram because she was pregnant: 'Guntram was astounded, because he knew she had given birth to another son [Chlothar II] four months previously'.[76] Gregory may have wished his audience to regard the narrow timeframe as cause for suspicion, since Chilperic had been assassinated not long after Chlothar's birth.[77] Or he may simply have wished to accuse Fredegund of fornication during a time when she might normally be expected to mourn the loss of her husband. Either way, her licentious disposition was a matter of record. Could she really have kept faithful to her husband?

Gregory came closest to accusing Fredegund of adultery when he described a vision he experienced while sleeping, in which he saw an angel pass above the church of St Martin in Tours and proclaim:

> Alas, alas, God has struck Chilperic and all his sons—nor has one survived from among those who have come forth from his loins who might rule ever in this kingdom.[78]

Gregory added that, although these words were spoken when Chilperic and his many sons were alive and well (the dream occurred c. 577), the prophecy was

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which there was unlikely to be any other satisfactory proof. Fredegund's compurgation, however, has no direct precedent in these texts, either in terms of the specific allegations or the number of compurgators, which is far greater than the usual six, twelve, twenty, or twenty-five required in other situations.

75 *Historiae*, VII. 21.

76 *Historiae*, VII. 7.

77 *Historiae*, VI. 41 and VI. 46.

78 *Historiae*, V. 14: '*Heu heu! Percussit Deus Chilpericum et omnes filios eius, nec superavit de his qui processerunt ex lumbis eius qui regat regnum illus in aeternum.*'

later fulfilled. There was a brief period, between 580 and 582, when Chilperic was sonless,[79] but he otherwise always had an heir, and upon his death in 584 he was survived by Chlothar II, who reigned through to the end of Gregory's own lifetime (c. 594) and beyond. Had the prophecy been fulfilled or not? Even if Gregory wrote this passage during the period of 580–82,[80] he allowed it to stand without modification thereafter, even though he reworked his *Histories* throughout his life, returning to older passages and editing them as necessary.[81] Gregory specifically referred to this as an example of a true prophecy, which he compared to the lies of soothsayers, mocking those who could not tell the difference. Moreover, the prophecy itself spoke of a future time when *both* Chilperic *and* his sons were dead, which was not even true in 580–82 and could not have become true until Chilperic's death in 584. The reader of the *Histories*, therefore, was left with only one conclusion: Chlothar was not 'among those who had come forth from Chilperic's loins'; he was, instead, the result of one of Fredegund's adulteries.

Violence and Queenship—To Bear the Sword?

Gregory may have escaped punishment for raising doubts about the legitimacy of Fredegund's sons, but Leudast suffered in the aftermath of the trial at Berny-Rivière. Fleeing the tribunal, he lived as a fugitive and outcast. Never without allies, he slowly improved his standing in the eyes of Chilperic, but he suffered Fredegund's enduring hostility. Then, in a bold gesture, he travelled to Paris one Sunday and entered the great cathedral prior to the celebration of Mass, falling prostrate before the queen and pleading for her forgiveness.[82] She was rather unimpressed.

> Fredegund became furious and, hating the very sight of him, she thrust Leudast away from her and cried out amid her tears: 'Since none of my

79 For the death of Chilperic's other sons, see *Historiae*, V. 18 (Merovech), V. 22 (Samson), V. 34 (Dagobert and Chlodobert), and V. 39 (Chlodovech). In 582, Chilperic had another son, Theuderic, but he died of disease in 584, which was followed shortly thereafter by the birth of Chlothar II (*Historiae*, VI. 23, VI. 27, and VI. 34–35). In studies of this issue, Theuderic is occasionally neglected and Chilperic's sonless period is listed as 580–84.

80 For this view, used as a basis for dating the composition of Book V, see Buchner, *Gregor von Tours*, vol. I, p. xxii.

81 The chronology of the composition of the *Histories* is discussed in the Introduction, pp. 10–11.

82 *Historiae*, VI. 32.

> sons are alive to take up my cause, to you, Lord Jesus, I entrust it.' Then, throwing herself at the king's feet, she continued: 'Woe is me that I see my enemy face to face and yet I cannot overcome him.'

Leudast was expelled from the cathedral, and Mass began. Yet Leudast remained confident that the queen had spoken the truth—that she had no one to take up her cause—and he dallied around the city, shopping and counting his coin without a care. Fredegund may have bemoaned her own helplessness, but her cries were feigned: Leudast was met in the streets by her men, assaulted, arrested, and dragged away. King Chilperic agreed that Leudast should be subjected to severe torture. 'On the orders of the queen, he was laid flat on his back along the ground, a great bar was placed under his head, and a second was hammered down on his throat,' Gregory wrote, before concluding: 'Thus did a perfidious life meet its fitting end.'

The wrath of a queen was clearly to be feared, especially if the king was willing to consent to her acts of vengeance, or at least to turn a blind eye. Yet clearly there were limits. For example, when Fredegund arranged the assassination of Praetextatus (who, as we saw in Chapter 6, had been restored as bishop of Rouen by King Guntram), she plotted in secret. Following the scandalous attack, she denied any involvement, and she even made a show of offering Praetextatus the services of her physicians as he lay dying.[83] When a leading man in Rouen suspected her of the crime, she invited him to dinner and then served him a poisoned cup. Guntram ordered three bishops to look into this latter murder, but Fredegund again escaped punishment, this time because loyal Neustrian officials thwarted the investigation. Thus, violence unto one's enemies remained an option for the resourceful queen, but often it required the cloak and dagger, and some foes remained beyond reach. Brunhild, too, endured the presence of hostile magnates in her kingdom, particularly Ursio and Berthefred, who were only ousted from power and put to death after the failed conspiracy of 587, even though (unlike the other conspirators) they had come into open conflict with the queen long before.[84] Of course, one might say that similar considerations weighed down even the most powerful of kings. It is not that queens had adversaries, however, but the manner in which they pursued them that suggests their acts of violence were not regarded with the same sense of legitimacy as those of their male counterparts. Gregory, for example, may have been happy to see Fredegund vanquish his nemesis Leudast, but (as we

83 *Historiae*, VIII. 31.

84 *Historiae*, IX. 12, with VI. 4.

have seen in Chapter 5) he decried her efforts to kill the sons of her husband's former wife, Audovera, and thereby eliminate a rival branch of the royal family.[85] Compare this, for example, to Gregory's account of Clovis, the 'great man and distinguished warrior',[86] who hunted down close relatives to ensure that only his progeny lived to rule Gaul.

> On a day when he had assembled his people together, Clovis is said to have made the following remark about those relatives he had put to death: 'It is a great sorrow for me that I live as a pilgrim among strangers, for I have no kinsmen left to help me when trouble threatens.' Yet he did not say this out of grief over their deaths, but out of cunning, for he hoped to discover some new relative he could kill.[87]

Violence at the highest level of society was far more likely to be regarded as legitimate if it was seen to be administered by the king rather than the queen. Royal women might expect obedience and subordination from their inferiors, which could include noblemen and bishops, but to enforce this on their own accord was to provoke controversy. With this in mind, we can assess and critique the interpretation offered by Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, who argued that the elite of Merovingian society, both men and women alike, participated in a single system of honour that involved displays of symbolic capital, including acts of violence.[88] From this she concluded that social position, rather than gender, offers the best context for analysing the acts of violence performed by the elite in Gaul.[89] It is certainly true that the elite cultivated esteem through prestigious displays of wealth and power, and that violence had its place in such social exchange. As we have seen throughout this study, much of the behaviour Gregory characterised as irrational becomes explicable once the pressures weighing upon those involved are elucidated. Yet it seems doubtful that the Merovingians adhered to a defined, extrajudicial code of honour

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85 *Historiae*, v. 14, v. 39.

86 *Historiae*, II. 12.

87 *Historiae*, II. 42.

88 Gradowicz-Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne*. See also Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an "Exchange of Violence"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 1–18; and Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Honneur féminin et pureté sexuelle: équation ou paradoxe?', in *Mariage et sexualité au Moyen Âge: accord ou crise?*, ed. by Michel Rouche (Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2000), pp. 37–52.

89 See especially Gradowicz-Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne*, p. 74.

(which was never expressly articulated in our written sources), or that this can explain the many, diverse acts of violence which Gradowicz-Pancer cited. Neither should gender be trivialised in an effort to understand why violence was undertaken (or how it was perceived). Like many elite women in Gregory's day, Brunhild and Fredegund were rarely afforded the luxury of using violence without fear or shame; rather more often, they sought either deniability or the legitimacy of a male agent. Their success depended on their ability to navigate every intricacy of elite society, including the subtleties that governed how men and women interacted with one another.

Conclusion

When Fredegund denounced Leudast and cried 'to you, Lord Jesus, I entrust my cause', she invoked a higher power to affirm her marital fidelity and to vanquish her accuser. And she made sure that Leudast suffered what many considered to be a divinely sanctioned punishment. Gregory too admitted that he had rejoiced in Leudast's downfall, but he surely also worried about his own security. Throughout her career, Fredegund proved capable of assassinating several important figures, including a political opponent resident in St Martin's church in Tours.[90] Furthermore, the question of Fredegund's marital fidelity mattered even after Chilperic's death, not only to the Neustrians, who elevated her son Chlothar II to the throne, but also to Guntram, who exerted hegemonic influence in Neustria as the young boy's guardian. Nevertheless, Gregory found clever ways to raise the issue of adultery in his *Histories*. Tellingly, he took no such chances with Brunhild. She escaped his criticism. Yet Merovingian politics presented few easy choices: respecting Brunhild may have been simple enough, but respecting Brunhild's interests was complicated, since it meant different things at different times, as Aegidius discovered to his own misfortune. Gregory's decision to write contemporary history under these circumstances is remarkable. As a bishop and an aristocrat, he had the responsibilities of not only a pastor, scholar, and administrator, but also necessarily those of a politician. He navigated them deftly, especially in his

90 *Historiae*, VII. 29. Gregory was *compater* to this political opponent (Eberulf), a type of spiritual kinship shared by a baptismal sponsor and the father of the child baptised (see *Historiae*, VII. 21–22). Fredegund also imprisoned the husband of Gregory's niece for seven months without just cause.

writings, employing various literary techniques to communicate his points to his audience in spite of the restrictions he faced. Subject unto *the powers that be* though he was, Gregory had little desire to submit to them in the same manner that he submitted himself to Almighty God. If he had, the *Histories* would never have been written.

Conclusion

Scholars have long combed through Gregory's works, untangling his narrative, removing details considered to be useless debris, and weaving together new historical reconstructions of sixth-century Gaul. Recent research on women in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages has also taken a particular interest in Gregory's material. Many of these studies, however, have proceeded without first establishing Gregory's literary objectives or the methods he used to achieve them. Methodologically, this is essential because Gregory represents such a complex author. He manipulated his material in a number of ways, which are often difficult, but not impossible, to discern. Gregory took particular care when presenting subjects close to his heart, and it so happens that he was keenly interested in relating information on women and presenting themes on matters such as widowhood, holiness and femininity, royal marital policy, and politically influential women, especially the queens Brunhild and Fredegund. The intersection between Gregory's interests and his methods is crucial, lest one arrive at the conclusion that his works are of only limited historical value. As the preceding seven chapters of this study have shown, the contrary is true: this approach enables one to produce an enriched historical reconstruction of events and to achieve a deeper understanding of Gregory's society and his place therein. Indeed, it is my hope that I have demonstrated the need to link a critical, historical assessment of Gregory's information with an analysis of the pressures and constraints that impacted his efforts as an author, and to identify the literary techniques he used to navigate these restrictions and express what he considered to be crucially important, even if this meant compromising the accuracy of details that were, in his estimation, of lesser significance.

Gregory was keenly aware of the difficulties he faced and he anticipated his critics. Quoting Sallust, he stated: 'To write history seems a difficult task, firstly because your words must match the events, and secondly because most will think that your admonishments have derived from jealousy or ill will.'[1] This is a defence we should take seriously. And we should note that Gregory's manipulation of his material almost always fell short of outright, intentional fabrication. Discretion, innuendo, omission, implication, juxtaposition, and interpretation were his preferred tools, while some of his more egregious historical errors can be blamed on his source material. This also reminds us that Gregory's audience must always be kept firmly within view. Gregory needed to

1 *Historiae*, IV. 13. This is a quote from Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, III. 2.

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present information that his audience would accept; this restricted his ability to take liberty with his material but on occasion it also forced him to present a version of events that had long been accepted as common knowledge, leaving him only the option of carefully weaving his own interpretation into a narration of accepted 'facts' (which a modern historical analysis might deem true or false). There is something of Gregory the preacher in this approach, shaping known stories into a new narration so that the details supported a greater moral point of his choosing. Because Gregory's life as a pastor is largely hidden from us, we need to remind ourselves just how much of his time was consumed by his pastoral, liturgical, and administrative duties.

As bishop of a metropolitan see, Gregory had many responsibilities. He travelled often, attending councils, visiting local shrines and monastic houses, consecrating oratories, installing relics, celebrating Mass, and keeping vigils. When in Tours he was equally busy, fulfilling his duties as local bishop and as the custodian of St Martin's shrine. There were dramatic moments: several high-profile political refugees sought sanctuary in the shrine, for example, while a dispute over inheritance led to the ransacking of a local convent.[2] Likewise, when rebellious nuns left their cloister in Poitiers (as we discussed in Chapter 3), they came to Tours, without supplies, shoes, or proper clothing.[3] Gregory provided them with food and shelter. But there were also many more mundane events: the organising of liturgical celebrations, the collecting and distributing of revenues, the resolution of minor disputes. Gregory's clergy also needed looking after: some required admonishment, such as the priest who refused to believe that the body could be resurrected,[4] while others caused trouble, like the two clerics who conspired to oust Gregory from his post during his trial in 580.[5] To other clergy, Gregory provided patronage: in 591, for example, he proudly escorted his archdeacon, Plato, to assume his newly acquired post as bishop of Poitiers.[6] And there was paperwork, most of it routine, though occasionally greater effort was required—such as when the former queen Ingoberg summoned Gregory to help draft her will (in which she left a dona-

2 On the refugees, see Rob Meens, 'Violence at the Altar: The Sacred Space around the Grave of St. Martin of Tours and the Practice of Sanctuary in the Early Middle Ages', in *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2009 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Frances Andrews (Donington: Tyas, 2011), pp. 71–89. For the ransacking, see *Historiae*, X. 12.

3 *Historiae*, IX. 40.

4 *Historiae*, X. 13.

5 *Historiae*, V. 49.

6 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, IV. 32; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 14.

tion to the cathedral in Tours and to St Martin's church, appreciatively).[7] At the conclusion of his *Histories*, Gregory summarised his own accomplishments as bishop: he repaired, improved, and rededicated the cathedral, which had been damaged in a fire;[8] he reinstituted the veneration of certain relics that had been neglected; he built a baptistery next to St Martin's church; and he wrote a number of works that included, in addition to his *Histories* and hagiographic works, a commentary on the Psalms, a work on the offices of the church, and a preface to the Masses of Sidonius.[9] Gregory, therefore, saw his corpus of writings as forming simply one part of his work and achievements as a bishop of the church.

If Gregory the author is all to frequently accused of providing misleading information, it is more often than not because scholarship has asked a set of questions alien to his own priorities (a criticism that in some respects might fairly be applied to this study as well). Gregory sought to accomplish something rather different than what many later readers wished. Indeed, the divide between author and readership opened relatively early, long before the era of modern scholarship. For example, a six-book recension of the *Histories* was produced in the seventh century that sought to expunge Gregory as a character from his own narrative.[10] In a different way, the project of redacting Gregory's text continues still, for example with Alexander Callander Murray producing a translation into English of excerpted sections from Books II to X so that the redacted material 'follows in a connected narrative the political events of the *Histories*'.[11] Gregory, we can be sure, would object. Indeed, he charged his successors in Tours with the responsibility of protecting his works from such activity:

> By the coming of our lord Jesus Christ and by the Day of Judgement, which is feared by all who have a debt to pay, these books are not to be erased or rewritten, retaining some parts and omitting others, but leave

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7 *Historiae*, IX. 26.

8 Gregory was sent a poem of congratulation for this work on the cathedral by Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, X. 6.

9 *Historiae*, X. 31. The preface and the commentary are lost, but for the chapter headings for the latter. Gregory has also been attributed as the author of a work on the *Miracles of the Blessed Andrew* and on the *Seven Sleepers in Ephesus*.

10 See Helmut Reimitz, 'Social Networks and Identity in Frankish Historiography: New Aspects of the Textual Tradition of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. by Richard Corrandini, Max Dieseberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 229–68.

11 Alexander Callander Murray, *Gregory of Tours: The Merovingians* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006).

> them whole and intact in your time just as they are now—or when you emerge in confusion to face the Judgement you will be condemned together with the Devil.[12]

A similar process seems to have been behind the attribution of the title *History of the Franks* to the work that Gregory himself termed *Ten Books of Histories*.[13] Gregory's interest was not in the Franks or their history per se. Indeed, the preface to the *Histories* made clear he was concerned with a very different subject: the struggle of the believers to live a moral and devout life in a world beset by violence, heresy, apathy, and what seemed to him to be a distinct absence of clear guidance. In a sense this concern also permeates his hagiographic writings, which he began when his mother urged him to publicise the miracles of St Martin in a simple style so that the common faithful might better understand God's agency in the human affairs.

The life to come haunts Gregory's works to such an extent that one might be tempted to regard the Day of Judgement as the overriding literary framework of his entire corpus. The women in these works all faced the same fundamental moral test that led to heaven or hell. Their worldly differences represented particular challenges and temptations in the proving ground that is this temporal life. As we saw in Chapter 1, for example, the death of a husband served as a decisive moment, granting a married woman the opportunity to shun the burdens of the world and pursue devotion to God uncompromisingly. Some of Gregory's most praiseworthy characters were pious widows, like Pelagia, who spent her widowhood in constant prayer and in support of monks, or Ingoberg, who was 'a very prudent woman, especially gifted in the religious life, diligent in her vigils, prayers, and almsgiving'. Likewise, Gregory's list of notorious characters included several widows who laboured to remain politically relevant after their husbands' deaths. Theudogild, for example, offered herself to Guntram after her husband died only to be tricked out of her wealth and forced into a monastery, while Sophia clung to power in Byzantium even as the righteous Tiberius stood ready to lead the empire by popular consent. Similarly, Gregory's derisory treatment of Goiswinth, a heretic and persecutor of the church, was enhanced by his description of her as a remarried widow. Even when faced with complex cases, such as Queen Chlothild and her

12 *Historiae*, x. 31.

13 See Walter Goffart, 'From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours', repr. in Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 255–74. Goffart provided a different interpretation of the motive behind the six-book recension (mentioned above) on pp. 271–74.

legacy that included unsavoury political dealings as well as religious devotion, Gregory remained consistent to his theme, presenting her as an example of redemption hinged upon a watershed moment of repentance.

In this way, an investigation into Gregory' views about widowhood naturally leads to insights into seemingly unrelated events such as Hermenegild's revolt or the timing of Clovis's baptism, which Gregory narrated as part of his greater moral instruction. At first it may seem surprising that Gregory had such sharp opinions about widowhood or that he allowed these to shape legnthy portions of his narrative. His particular interest in the subject may be explained in large part through an analysis of his relationship with his mother, Armentaria, who became a widow while he was still quite young. Gregory presented his mother as an exemplar; he did not shy from asserting that she had been his spiritual mentor who interpreted his dreams and who inspired him to virtuous behaviour. Gregory was happy to admit that Armentaria's spiritual superiority permitted her to witness a miracle at the feast of St Polycarp that he himself was unworthy to see. And when he confessed that his pride in performing a miracle had caused him to be abruptly, and embarrassingly, thrown from his horse, he implied that his mother was in need of no such lesson. Within Gregory's works, Armentaria was literarily and figuratively allowed to remain atop her high horse. In achieving this portrait of the ideal widow and mother, Gregory passed over Armentaria's involvement in mundane pursuits, such as the management of her estates, the promotion of her sons' careers, and the resolution of family disputes. It was a technique he used many times, though in this instance only a light touch was required. Armentaria was clearly committed to living out her widowhood in devotion to God, according to biblical models, and her piety played a significant role in the formation of Gregory's own spirituality.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Gregory discussed femininity, holiness, and chastity in a nuanced and complex way, particularly in the preface to his account of the saintly Monegund. For example, Gregory compared the practices of asceticism to the physical hardships of war, which required virtues closely associated with masculinity, though women like Monegund were able to exhibit these virtues as well, 'sweating in these battles and winning the field'. Gregory balanced this characterisation, however, by simultaneously drawing upon symbols of holiness more closely associated with femininity, such as the Virgin Mary and the Queen of Sheba, and he laced his account of Monegund's life with references to experiences particular to her as a woman and a mother. Many of the saints in Gregory's hagiography, Monegund included, embraced sexual abstinence as part of an uncompromising approach to religious devotion, but Gregory also praised sexually active individuals, and he was even willing to describe them as 'chaste' so long as they kept their activities within express boundaries. Gregory

clearly thought there were multiple ways to achieve sanctification, even if certain fundamental principles remained the same for everyone. Among such unchanging principles, etched into the social order, we must highlight the authority of the (exclusively male) episcopate, which took precedence even when bishops interacted with holy women, both on earth and in heaven. As we saw in Chapter 3, this caused Gregory some difficulty when he described the dispute between Radegund, whose saintly reputation he had no intention of questioning, and her local bishop, Maroveus. Rather unreasonably, Gregory placed all of the blame on his colleague, whose outrageous and incomprehensible behaviour left Radegund with no choice but to seek out support from other bishops, all of whom she obeyed. This approach allowed Gregory to avoid the tension between his general principle and its practical application in complicated circumstances—a problem he faced more than once in his writings. Here one can also detect the influence of Gregory's personal loyalties, since Radegund had been in important figure in his career.

Gregory also had opinions on the manner in which Merovingian kings chose their brides, and he articulated these most clearly as a distinct theme within Book IV of the *Histories*, as we saw in Chapter 4. Gregory thought a bride was best selected for her good character, high birth, wealth, and grace, but to his dismay most Merovingians instead selected lowborn women, marrying some and taking others as concubines. Gregory argued that this approach, motivated by lust and whimsy, resulted in the production of too many potential heirs from different mothers which in turn led to political instability and civil war. Gregory was not alone in his criticism of Merovingian marital policy, but in making his case he neglected to mention the counterargument and its rationale. Reading the *Histories*, one might easily overlook the many instances in which kings died without leaving a clear successor or came dangerously close to doing so. As we saw in Chapter 5, the Merovingians needed a system that was flexible enough to ensure the production and enfranchising of sons as heirs while simultaneously allowing kings to rearrange circumstances as their political needs dictated. The approach taken by those kings who suffered Gregory's harshest critique was, in fact, based on a coherent, reasoned policy, drawn from existing customs that made a distinction between concubines, taken from the unfree members of one's household, and the wife, whose position was marked by exclusive privileges and legitimated by ritual. The result, though Gregory was not one to admit it, was a complex marital policy that enabled most kings to pursue their goals satisfactorily.

Here again Gregory's own loyalties can be identified as playing a role in shaping his material, since his example of an ideal union—Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild—surely owed a debt to the couple's role in appointing him

as bishop of Tours. Indeed, the marriage stands out among the examples in Book IV of the *Histories* not only because Sigibert's choice of bride was wisely and prudently made, but also because the birth of their son, Childebert II, gave reason for hope in the future. Gregory was less subtle than usual in expressing this hope, conspicuously employing Childebert's regnal years as the chronological framework for Books V–X. More significantly for us, Gregory also handled his material on Brunhild carefully, avoiding any criticism of the queen and comparing her positively to her counterpart and rival, Fredegund, as we saw in Chapter 6. Indeed, Brunhild represents one of the few politically active individuals, male or female, to escape criticism in Gregory's works. This is all the more remarkable since Brunhild and Fredegund actually had similar careers. Other sources remembered Brunhild rather more in the mould of the conniving and ruthless Fredegund, and although these later sources were obviously not indebted to the political circumstances of the sixth century, it is worth pointing out that, much as Gregory wished to cast Brunhild in a good light, he lacked specific examples of her virtuous behaviour. Whether motivated by love or fear (and it was probably a bit of both), Gregory's careful treatment of Brunhild means that she should be added to the list of other powerful figures, like Chilperic and Guntram, who impacted the contents of his works.

If Gregory's complimentary treatment of Brunhild was personal, so was his wholly negative presentation of Fredegund. As we saw in Chapter 7, Gregory had been put on trial in 580, accused of slandering Fredegund with the charge of adultery, and he may well have been guilty, as a close reading of his *Histories* suggests. He had certainly felt comfortable accusing her of every other manner of crime, from murder to sacrilege. Nevertheless, Gregory managed to acquit himself by appealing to his social station, by calling upon his supporters, and by undermining the credibility of his accusers. Judging by the fate of his colleagues Praetextatus of Rouen and Aegidius of Reims, Gregory was rather fortunate. Unlike other accusations that might be made against a queen, adultery threatened not only her position but also that of her children, since it called into question the paternity of the king's sons and raised doubts about their right to rule a share of the kingdom. As is evident in the careers of both Brunhild and Fredegund, as well as in several other examples, the position of the queen at court could be tenuous, especially after the death of the king, when it became necessary for a woman to either remarry or to exert influence in conjunction with her minor son and his guardians, lest she find herself outside the circles of power, perhaps even the subject of a purge targeting her and her children. Brunhild and Fredegund's positions at court fluctuated over the course of their careers, yet their political agency endured, even if it took different forms, enabling them to set objectives and to attempt, successfully or

unsuccessfully, to achieve them. This agency, which Brunhild and Fredegund shared with many other high-status women, may not have drawn much cheer from Gregory, but the queens were never without supporters, including within the episcopate.

Gregory's treatment of women within his works must be integrated with scholarly research that has called attention to different aspects of his personality and produced a complex image of the author, which we discussed in the Introduction. Gregory has been interpreted as something of a mystic, attuned to the spiritual aspects of the human experience and the presence of the divine in nature.[14] He has also been presented as a cynic, criticising secular power and the futility of worldly pursuits to the point of satire.[15] Yet however much Gregory favoured the eternal over the temporal, he was never able to shed the burdens of the world and the banal concerns it had to offer, including money, politics, and intrigue. Gregory saw his brother murdered over an ecclesiastical post by a relative, yet he pursued his own career in the church with unwavering conviction. He promoted the veneration of the saints, but he paid particular attention to those saints whose cults were associated with his family and the familial estates.[16] He thought that bishops ought to be beyond the reproach even of kings, yet he visited all three royal courts, conversed with the rulers of his day, and maintained extensive contacts with the nobility, as was befitting his station as an aristocrat and a member of a respected, senatorial family.[17] Little surprise, then, to see scholarship compare Gregory to Procopius, a fellow historian and court insider who produced, among other works, a *Secret History* detailing the failings of the Byzantine emperor Justinian and his morally bankrupt wife Theodora.[18]

Gregory was inclined to regard problems, and thus solutions, as fundamentally moral in nature. This gave his social critique a personal aspect, reminiscent of the prophetic call to every individual to 'prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths', which focused on reforming believers rather than institutions. And, for Gregory, an understanding of morality could not be separated from an understanding of the divine will. However mystical he may have sounded from time to time, Gregory did not adhere to an esoteric spirituality: God's agency in human affairs was apparent and clear to anyone familiar with

14 de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*.

15 Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*.

16 Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power'; Wood, 'The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont'.

17 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, pp. 50–81.

18 Wood, 'The Secret Histories'.

the details; the meaning of events required only brief, even curt explanation. If his own society seemed lost, then it was because of its collective sinfulness, which made it blind to the guidance that was otherwise clear. Personal faults, like pride and lust, set one on the wrong path, beset by unseen, demonic influences. 'The first humans lived blessedly in the pleasures of paradise, until they were lured by the serpent's guile and broke the divine commandments.'[19] Thus Gregory described the Fall of Man, without singling out Eve for special condemnation. In this regard he was unusual, contrasting a longstanding tradition within Christian theology.[20] This reminds us that, as much as Gregory might seem to represent broader views, there remains an irreducibly individual quality to his life and works.[21] With his writings, as with his other pastoral activities, he presented his audience with examples of moral success and failure, and the divine response to such behaviour, which had been occurring since the Fall. The devil preyed upon human faults and led the weak astray. It was a threat faced by men and women alike—though, as with the path to heaven, the path to hell varied depending on the particular challenges one faced.

This study has sought to provide a close reading of Gregory's entire corpus of works, read together with contemporary sources, in order to determine his opinions and objectives, as well as the narrative strategies he used to communicate these to his audience. As a final note, I should mention one literary technique, of great importance yet extremely difficult to analyse and convey, which Gregory employed with great skill, namely charisma. Indeed, the longstanding scholarly interest in Gregory's writings derives not only from solid academic reasons, such as his importance as a source for the sixth-century West, but also from the entertaining, compelling, and even touching nature of his narratives. It is difficult not to be moved, for example, by Gregory's story of the paralytic woman, brought in a cart to a monastery in Ligugé and placed before the site where St Martin had once brought a dead man to life; she laboured to reach the railing marking the great miracle and then implored the saint, with tears pouring from her eyes, to restore her to health.[22] We share Gregory's amazement

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19 *Historiae*, I. 1.

20 See Klaus Thraede, 'Zwischen Eva und Maria: Das Bild der Frau bei Ambrosius und Augustin auf dem Hintergrund der Zeit', in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, ed. by Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 129–39. The bishops gathered to pass judgement on the rebellious nuns from Poitiers, for example, compared the nuns' abandonment of the cloister with Eve's expulsion from Paradise (*Historiae*, IX. 39).

21 Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours'.

22 *Virtutes sancti Martini*, IV. 30.

when she walks away, fully healed. Similarly, we immediately grasp the sense of disgust and injustice Gregory felt in recounting the story of a minor cleric who was arrested, flogged, and tortured after his jealous colleague falsely accused him of treason against the king—a story of no great historical significance but engaging all the same.[23] Like Gregory, we cannot feel sorry for Childeric the Saxon, who choked on his own vomit after a night of drinking, because such an end was fitting for a man who committed so many vile crimes.[24] And we share Gregory's sense of dread when we read what should otherwise be a dry chapter heading: 'The tax collectors came to Poitiers and Tours. . . .'[25] I hope that the close reading of Gregory's works offered here, focused as it is on technical matters of narrative composition and historical reconstructions, has not washed away all traces of Gregory's charm and wit. If this study has been intended primarily to serve as a contribution to scholarship on Gregory of Tours, on women in Late Antiquity, and on the transformation of the Roman world in general, then perhaps it might also act as a testament to a master storyteller and to the women who featured prominently in his life and in his stories, without which we would be all that much poorer.

23 *Historiae*, VIII. 11.

24 *Historiae*, X. 22.

25 *Historiae*, IX. 30.

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